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General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

14th plenary meeting
Saturday, 25 September 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 125 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/54/333/Add.3)

The President: In a letter contained in document A/54/333/Add.3, the Secretary-General informs me that, since the issuance of his communications contained in document A/54/333 and addenda 1 and 2, Guinea has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: The General Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau.

Mr. Tommy Remengesau, Jr., Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, His Excellency Mr. Tommy Remengesau, Jr., and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Remengesau (Palau): Let me first congratulate you, Sir, on your unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We likewise extend our appreciation to Mr. Didier Opertti, the President of the Assembly at its fifty-third session. We wish also to convey our appreciation and thanks to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan for his leadership in promoting the objectives and the mission of the United Nations.

I wish to convey the warm greetings of President Kuniwo Nakamura, the entire leadership and the people of the Republic of Palau to the Assembly on the occasion of the fifty-fourth session. On behalf of the Government and the people of Palau, I extend our sincere appreciation to the members of this body for their assistance.

Since attaining membership of the United Nations in 1994, the Republic of Palau has benefitted greatly from a variety of United Nations-sponsored programmes and from international cooperation, which have helped us play our role in promoting peace and democracy in our region. This year, on 1 October, we proudly celebrate the fifth anniversary of our independence, which came about as a result of a unique and very successful political treaty with the United States of America under the Compact of Free Association. Diplomatic relations and economic cooperation with a growing number of members of this body assure stability and promise great economic potential for the future.

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Before I proceed, let me take this rare opportunity to welcome three of our regional neighbours — the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga — and to congratulate them on joining this important Organization.

Palau also expresses its appreciation and support for the efforts of the Security Council in promoting peace, security and the protection of human rights and democracy throughout the world, and especially in troubled areas in need of United Nations intervention.

Today we have less than 100 days left before entering the new millennium — 97 days to be exact. There are indeed many global issues and problems that certainly deserve our attention. The existence of the Earth in the next millennium may, however, be in great jeopardy if the environment and nature's forces can no longer support the human population. Global warming or climate change may merit the upmost attention and our concerted effort. I call upon every Member State, large and small, developed and developing, rich and poor, to work cooperatively to find meaningful solutions and preventive actions for this growing international problem and challenge. I am confident that through sharing information on climate change we can learn from one another and take the necessary steps to meet this very dangerous global problem.

Let me share a Palauan proverb with the Assembly, one that foreshadows climate change. In Palau the winds are mainly from the east or from the west. When there are easterly winds, the sky is not so telling before the rain. As the rain commences, one may think it is just a light shower. However, it actually comes in a downpour. In the old days our raincoat was simply several leaves sewn together and put over our heads. So we would get soaked through and through during this downpour. The message is: do not underestimate the easterly winds, or you will get deluged with water.

That is our message from yesterday, and it is our message today: do not take climate change lightly, or there will be dire consequences. Climate change for small island nations such as the Republic of Palau has great consequences because of our fragile ecosystem. To expand on just a few examples, the El Niño phenomenon, which impacted many communities throughout the globe, had far-reaching and devastating effects in Palau as well. At least one third of all our hard coral communities died. Our reefs are home to over 500 species of corals and 1,500 species of fish, and are vibrant with marine life. The loss of our coral communities effects our entire ecosystem and eventually our people and their economic livelihoods. The El Niño phenomenon also caused extreme drought that dried up our main water reservoir and destroyed over 1,400 patches of our most important root crop, taro, which of course added another burden to our daily lives.

Palau and our Pacific region are also suffering from unusually high rises in tide tables, causing our farmlands to be infiltrated with salt water that eventually will have dire effects on our crops. This high sea level rise has literally caused islands to disappear, and others are in imminent danger of disappearing. Abnormally warm ocean temperatures have also caused extensive coral bleaching, and rising atmospheric temperatures devastate agriculture. According to the 1999-2000 *World Development Report*, a 1 metre sea level rise due to climate change would force about 70 million people to move, and would have a dramatic effect on food security in central Asia and the Pacific. Many other examples exist, I am sure.

These few examples, and examples in other countries, beg for global cooperation on climate change. The Republic of Palau recognizes the link between climate change and biodiversity, and is committed to preserving our biodiversity. Protecting our forests is one of the most effective mechanisms to slow climate change. Forests, as we know, are carbon sinks, which absorb carbon dioxide rather than releasing it as a harmful greenhouse gas. Because of this, the destruction of forest has a dramatic impact on climate change. The Republic of Palau has taken responsibility for its forests through the National Forest Act and Mangrove Management Plan. Progress is being made on national regulations requiring protective vegetative zones along our wetland and coastal areas. The Republic of Palau sponsors a summer tree planting programme for our children in order to teach our youth the importance of our natural resources. We are taking steps necessary to ensure that our forests and reefs are available for future generations.

The Republic of Palau has incorporated the grave issues of climate change and rises in sea level into long-term strategic planning. Instruments for accession to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol are in transmission, and we humbly request international assistance to develop a comprehensive vulnerability index that encompasses economic and environmental factors like climate change.

We enthusiastically support efforts to adjust energy prices to accurately reflect the environmental consequences of fossil fuel use. Alongside climate change, energy conservation is critical to Palau's economy and the environment. We have established a national policy, the National Energy Goal, to subsidize renewable energy programmes, and have audited all Government facilities for energy efficiency. At our national hospital we replaced standard incandescent lights with energy efficient compact fluorescent lamps. Solar panels provide lights for our outer islands and isolated villages. Solar beacons light our reef channels. Our national energy programme and public utility corporation are in partnership with the Million Solar Rooftops initiative to educate the public about renewable energy applications. Let us start off the new century with a dynamic move away from fossil fuels and towards a commitment to environment friendly energy alternatives.

Entering into relevant agreements and conventions which target international response to environmental issues is another responsibility that our Republic has to its people and this world community. It is one that we are fulfilling as time goes on, being a signatory and party to eight international agreements, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Republic of Palau views climate change as being in the forefront of issues that need to be addressed, and that can only be effectively addressed if all Member States meaningfully contribute on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities. The use of the Kyoto mechanisms is an integral component of a global solution to the issue of climate change. Therefore, it is critical that no artificial restrictions be placed on the use of these mechanisms. If we can all come to terms with the intent of the Kyoto mechanisms and develop a fair and realistic approach to their use, there will be no sufficient reason why we cannot enter the new millennium with positive remedies to the issue of climate change. Maybe we can even enter the new millennium with a breath of fresh air.

As we travel towards the new millennium, let us move forward with the tools that we have developed as an international family, so that the benefits, although they may go unseen in our generation, may be fully appreciated by our children and their children. These initiatives shall be our imprint, our assurance of a healthier environment for generations to come.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Tommy Remengesau, Jr., Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, was escorted from the rostrum.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General Debate

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, His Excellency Mr. Ural Latypov.

Mr. Latypov (Belarus): Please, Sir, accept my most sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session, as well as my wishes for every success in the discharge of this complex and responsible mission. We are thankful for the work of your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti. We also greatly appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to effectively and energetically lead our Organization.

Belarus welcomes the enlargement of the United Nations family of nations, which recently accepted three new members: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is being held at the doorway between centuries and millennia. This fact alone urges us to take an in-depth look at both the past and the present of the United Nations and to think about its future. The expanding global challenges, especially ethnic conflicts, deterioration of the environment, transnational crime and terrorism can be met only by concerted efforts of the United Nations.

Belarus will be actively contributing to the formation of a new image of the United Nations as an organization capable of tackling the challenges of the day. Our country was among the Organization's founding members, who bestowed upon the United Nations such high and noble goals and principles. We are interested in their consolidation and development.

This year the Organization experienced what was probably one of the most serious tests in its entire history. The United Nations was virtually marginalized during the crisis around Yugoslavia. The decision to use military force against a sovereign State was taken without the authorization of the Security Council.

Although the settlement of the Kosovo crisis has now been brought back under the auspices of the United Nations, a recurrence of attempts to randomly use force outside the Security Council mechanism cannot be excluded. Consequently, the question as to whether the Security Council should remain the only — I reiterate, the only — international institution to authorize the use of force for the maintenance of international peace and security as yet remains unanswered.

The answer that is today given to this question will determine developments in the twenty-first century. Will it be the age of fairness and the rule of law, or will the world be thrown back into the era when force was the only argument? From a historical perspective, such a development would return us to the beginning of this century. Let us recall that the dawn of the twentieth century saw nations divided into two categories: subjects and objects of international law, with their fate totally dependent upon their ability to defend themselves by military force.

I believe that a totally different world order would most adequately meet the interests of all members of the international community. This is a world order in which all countries are equal and are protected by international law and the United Nations. The prerogative of the Security Council to establish and maintain peace and security is a key element of this system.

Naturally this places a special burden of responsibility on the Security Council and its members. We view the increase in both permanent and non-permanent members of the Council on the basis of equitable geographical distribution to be an important measure that would improve the Council's effectiveness.

Guided by the intention to contribute further to strengthening peace and security, Belarus has presented its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2002-2003. The elections will be held in 2001, during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

As regards the responsibility of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace and security, I would also like to underline the need to make fuller use of the entire set of measures envisaged in the Charter. Special emphasis should be put on the prevention of conflicts by peaceful means, which, if applied in a consistent and efficient manner, would produce substantial results. This can be explicitly illustrated by recent positive developments in the Middle East peace process, which Belarus welcomes and supports. I avail myself of this opportunity to reaffirm the readiness of the Government of the Republic of Belarus to contribute actively to the resolution of conflicts in post-Soviet countries and, in particular, to host in our capital, Minsk, the international conference on Nagorny Karabakh.

More than half a century ago, sovereign States, including Belarus, founded the United Nations to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person". To uphold its legal and moral commitments the international community cannot and must not remain inactive in the face of gross and systematic violations of human rights. Genocide in Rwanda, events in East Timor — these and similar occurrences must lead to immediate and decisive action on the part of the United Nations. But such action must be taken in full compliance with the decisions of the Security Council.

At the same time it is obvious that the sacred principle of the protection of human rights, once interpreted selectively, becomes meaningless. Unfortunately, double standards in the interpretation of the notion of human rights are still applied all too often in international politics. It would be dangerously misleading to assume that human rights can be protected by means that ignore the principle of the sovereign equality of States. Disregarding State interests in the pursuit of individual values can cause unpredictable consequences.

Globalization is creating a situation in which the prosperity and even more the underdevelopment of certain regions, or conflicts in them, directly affect the global state of affairs. From this perspective, the developments of the twenty-first century will be largely influenced by processes taking shape in the enormous Eurasian region, of which my country is an integral part.

Multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Belarus has, thank God, avoided the religious and ethnic conflicts that have been so characteristic of many post-Soviet countries. Duly organized governmental management and law enforcement systems have allowed us to ensure an adequate level of security for our society and people. Situated on the crossroads between the east and the west, the north and the south of the continent, Belarus will be further contributing to international cooperation in combating transborder crime, terrorism and illicit drug trafficking.

A few days ago Belarus became party to the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings. We also support the idea of holding a United Nations conference or a special session of the General Assembly on the suppression of terrorism.

Belarus is ready to cooperate most actively with all members of the international community to address these and other global and regional challenges. Openness to mutually beneficial cooperation is probably one of the main features of Belarus' foreign policy, which sincerely seeks to establish a network of good neighbourly relations embracing our country.

Although consistent in its principled position on the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Belarus demonstrates good will and acts constructively to prevent the re-emergence of new dividing lines in Europe. In this context, we support the idea of adopting, at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Istanbul, the charter for European security, which is to become a code of behaviour for all of Europe.

Historically and geographically belonging to European civilization, Belarus is seeking to become a full fledged member of integration processes on the continent. The rapprochement between Belarus and Russia is in line with processes of global development. The consolidation of efforts by Belarus and Russia, enjoying wide public support in both countries, allows us to more effectively solve problems faced by the two States and two peoples.

Belarus has become a full fledged member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). We share the values and philosophy of the Movement and the provisions of the NAM Plan of Action that are consonant with the United Nations principles and objectives, as well as with the global challenges of establishing a multipolar world order.

Regrettably, the world is entering the new century with the burden of arms so powerful they can extinguish all life on the planet. For this reason, disarmament, especially in the nuclear sphere, remains among the main priorities of the United Nations. A few years ago, Belarus made an historic choice by relinquishing the possession of nuclear arms inherited from the former Soviet Union. Now, we urge all countries which have not yet become parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to join those that have made the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free world their utmost priority. We also stand for an early agreement on the prohibition of the production of fissile materials.

In conditions in which the nuclear Powers are still not ready fully to relinquish the possession of such arms, there is a pressing need to withdraw them from as much of the world as possible, especially from heavily populated regions. Proceeding from this, we once again call on countries of our region to review their attitudes towards the initiative put forward by President Lukashenka of Belarus on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free space in Central and Eastern Europe, as reflected in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly. The assumption by countries of our region of binding legal commitments not to deploy nuclear weapons on their territory would be of paramount importance to the security of the European family of nations. I believe that, sooner or later, all our neighbours will arrive at this obvious conclusion. Since time is of the essence, we propose to begin consultations immediately with all interested parties to exchange ideas and bridge positions on this problem.

Other types of weapons of mass destruction are by no means less dangerous. We welcome the appeal voiced from this high rostrum to protect our children from the scourge of nuclear, chemical and biological warfare. We believe that the international community would be taking the right step if it were to establish a preventive mechanism to take timely and coordinated measures to control the development and production of new types of weapons of mass destruction.

Proceeding from this, the Belarus delegation at this session will initiate a draft resolution on the prohibition of the development and manufacture of new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons. Likewise, we support the proposal to adopt a resolution on the consolidation of and respect for the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

As was rightly observed in this Hall, the strength and effectiveness of the United Nations depend on the sustainable development of its Member States. Having achieved independence, Belarus has chosen its own model of economic development which adequately reflects its national conditions and capacity. This is a model socially oriented market economy. Our objective is not simply the implementation of reforms for their own sake, but the achievement of a more effective economy. In recent years, we have been maintaining a positive dynamic of gross domestic product growth that, in 1998, was up by

8 per cent. Belarus is a self-reliant country. Our outstanding debt is only $133 per capita.

An open economy, Belarus exports more than half of its gross domestic product and is taking energetic measures to find an appropriate place in the international division of labour. Our country has all the necessary prerequisites for that, including extensive technical and scientific potential and human resources. Economic performance is essential for safeguarding social stability. The development of democratic institutions is an integral part of sustainable development. Mindful of that, the Government of Belarus has initiated a broad dialogue between all political forces in the country in an effort to jointly analyze avenues for the further political development of Belarus at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The parliamentary elections in 2000 and the presidential elections in 2001 should play an important role in this process. The Government of Belarus will make every effort to conduct these elections democratically and freely.

Among the important global challenges facing the United Nations is the protection of the environment and the alleviation of the negative consequences of natural disasters and technological catastrophes. For more than 13 years now, this has been a matter of survival for the Belarusian nation. The elimination of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster accounts for almost 20 per cent of our annual budget spending. I take this opportunity to express most sincere gratitude to all the States and international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations which throughout these years have never been dispassionate about the tragedy of the Belarusian people. Positively assessing the efforts of the United Nations, Belarus today calls upon the international community to continue cooperation and strengthen the United Nations role in this direction. Together with the Russian Federation and Ukraine, Belarus will present a draft resolution on this issue at the current session. We are hopeful that the United Nations Member States will render their valuable support.

The current session of the General Assembly is an important stage in preparing for the Millennium Assembly that should take practical decisions worthy of this forum. The Republic of Belarus has proposed as a subject for discussion at the 2000 Assembly the issue of the United Nations role in the furtherance of peace and human sustainable development in conditions of globalization. Aware of the historic importance of this event, Belarus will actively contribute to the success of the Millennium Assembly and Summit and reaffirms its commitment to the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency Mr. Paek Nam Sun.

Mr. Paek Nam Sun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): At the outset, please allow me to express, on behalf of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, our pleasure on congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We believe that your diplomatic skill and rich experience will greatly contribute to our work at this session.

I avail myself of this opportunity to extend my gratitude to Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uruguay, for his tangible contribution to United Nations activities during his tenure of his office as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I also express appreciation for the efforts of the Secretary-General towards strengthening the functions and the role of the United Nations.

The current session, which is being held at the historic turn of the century, has an important mission to give new hope to humankind. The challenges and the difficulties facing international society are growing ever more complex and intricate. The cold war has ended but domination and hegemony continue to exist. High-handedness and arbitrariness continue to pose major threats to international peace and security. Because of the high-handedness and arbitrariness, so prevalent in international relations, the principles of justice and fairness are often disregarded and the principle of sovereign equality — a lifeline to United Nations activities — is shaken to its very foundation.

Moreover, we have recently seen grave situations whereby the internal affairs of sovereign States are interfered in by force. Today international society must choose one of the two following options: whether the twenty-first century will be a century of independence, equality and peace, or whether it will be a century of high-handedness and arbitrariness. If we choose the latter, all countries with weak national defence capabilities will be vulnerable to bombing, as was the case in Yugoslavia.

As we are all well aware, the Korean peninsula stands at the centre of international peace and security. Therefore, as a party directly concerned, I wish to take this opportunity to present the details of views and

positions regarding the present situation there. This will, we believe, be a most effective contribution to the work of the current session.

At present, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is being blatantly portrayed as a dangerous area of nuclear weapons proliferation and a source of missile threats. For example, an empty tunnel is suspected of being an underground nuclear facility and a satellite is labelled a ballistic missile. These are now being used as pretexts for reviving a "star wars" plan, a phantom of the cold war, in a variant named "the missile defence system". Meanwhile, the attempts of a defeated State to rearm and to re-emerge as a military power are being accelerated at the fastest possible speed and even a debate calling for nuclear armaments has come to the fore.

Pursuant to operation plan 502798, aimed at preemptive attacks against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, large-scale strike forces have been surreptitiously amassed in and around South Korea. They are entering into actual combat readiness through various joint military exercises. It is becoming almost a reality, not simply an assumption, that the Korean peninsula will become a second Balkans. In the Balkan region, a humanitarian crisis served as a pretext for war, whereas on the Korean peninsula, the so-called missile issue is likely to be used instead.

Our satellite launch is an exercise of equal rights in the use of outer space that is recognized by the United Nations. Strengthening our national defence capabilities is an exercise of our sovereign right of legitimate defence: it does not constitute a violation of any obligations the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has under existing international treaties. Nevertheless, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has become a target of United States high-handedness and arbitrariness. The reason is very clear: placing the entire Korean peninsula under its control is a top priority of the Asia strategy of the United States. As Yugoslavia becomes an impediment to United States domination over the Balkan area, so the adherence of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to socialism is considered an obstacle to its Asia strategy.

Much the same can be said about why Japan is so hysterically resorting to a campaign against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Japan has not liquidated its past crimes against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, alone amongst countries. Japan is miscalculating that, if the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were stifled, the issue of liquidating its past crimes would fade away by itself. Not only that, Japan is fabricating threats, one after the other, as an excuse to become a military Power.

Our people love peace and aspire to it even more than others: they lived for the first half of this century under the colonial rule of Japan and they have been living for the second in a state of belligerence with the United States. Nevertheless, we do not beg for peace: we want a peace in which we can enjoy an independent life, not the peace of slaves denied all freedom.

Sovereignty is the lifeline of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and socialism is the life of our people. It is the unshakeable will of our people, and State policy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to defend, consolidate and develop to the utmost our own style of socialism, chosen by the people themselves. This is an exercise of the right to self-determination and freedom of choice recognized by the United Nations. The present-day confrontation on the Korean peninsula is in essence a confrontation between those who are masters of their own country trying to defend all that is theirs and the foreign forces attempting to harm them. This is the main factor underlying the continuing instability on the Korean peninsula.

Herein also lies the answer to the question of who is posing a threat to whom. It is not easy for our people, whose territory and population are small and who still lack almost everything, to defend their sovereignty single-handedly in the face of the collective, hostile power politics of the United States and its forces of subordination. We have no alternative but to strengthen our national defence capability ourselves, although this means we must tighten our belts. Because of our lack of capacity, Comrade Kim Jong Il, the great leader of our people, is employing an "army first" policy. This policy is our own unique way of uniting the whole people with the army into a bulwark, thus enabling us both to defend the country and develop its economy. Despite the persistent political, military and economic moves of hostile forces to suffocate us, up until now we have succeeded in defending our sovereignty and preventing another war on the Korean peninsula. This proves the strength of the "army first" policy, for defending socialism and ensuring peace with weapons.

The way to ensure lasting peace and security on the Korean peninsula is to end the hostile relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States and reunify Korea. The Democratic

People's Republic of Korea and the United States are still in a state of temporary armistice. Easing tension on the Korean peninsula and eliminating the danger of war will be possible when the United States discards, among other things, its hostile policy against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and concludes a peace agreement with it. There is no convincing reason why the United States must continue to antagonize the Democratic People's Republic of Korea alone in north-east Asia, almost 10 years after the end of the cold war. We do not want war, but we do strive to achieve the peaceful reunification of our country.

We have already made it clear that we would not regard the United States as a permanent enemy. We have also fully shown our good faith through our sincere implementation over the last five years of the Agreed Framework between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We have also made it clear that, while we will make continued efforts to catch up with neighbouring countries in the field of peaceful space activities, we are ready for discussions on the missile issue at any time, if hostile nations are sincere in their intentions to dispel our concern. Now it is the turn of the United States to prove its good faith to us with deeds, if it does not harbour ill intent towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It is fortunate that the United States has recently decided on a partial lifting of economic sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but we look forward to a comprehensive and genuine lifting of them all.

If the United States stops pursuing its hostile policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and moves towards improved relations, we also will respond with good faith. For the present, we are to have high-level talks towards a settlement of outstanding issues between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States. These are to be held in response to the request from the United States, and missile launches will be suspended while the talks are under way.

The United States should not attempt to test the strength of our military capability or frighten and subdue our people with military threats and provocations. Reckless acts such as these will surely result in a strong self-defence response with possibly catastrophic consequences.

The United Nations should fulfil its responsibility for ensuring peace on the Korean peninsula by implementing, as early as possible, General Assembly resolution 3390 (XXX) B, calling for dissolution of the United Nations Command.

The early achievement of national reunification is the long-cherished desire of our nation. At the same time, it is a prerequisite for ensuring durable peace and security on the Korean peninsula. As long as Korea remains divided, the situation on the Korean peninsula and its surrounding areas will never be stable. This is detrimental to peace in Asia and also in the rest of the world.

We have already established national reunification principles. The three principles of independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity, which the North and South of Korea confirmed and made public at home and abroad, in the 4 July joint statement, constitute the grand reunification programme. They form the cornerstone of national reunification, which the United Nations officially welcomed in the resolution adopted at the twentieth session of the General Assembly.

The most above board and reasonable way to achieve reunification is the confederal formula, by which the North and South of Korea would be able to realize national reunification fairly and smoothly on the basis of preserving each other's ideas and systems as they are. Any attempts by one side to change the other, to make claims about the "sunshine policy" and engagement, while ignoring the reality that two different ideas and systems are existing in the North and South, will only mean confrontations and conflict.

In order to eliminate confrontations between the North and the South, and to promote national reconciliation and unity, the South Korean authorities should abolish, *inter alia*, the national security law, which has identified fellow countrymen as the enemy. The fact that delegates of patriotic organizations for reunification in South Korea who visited Pyongyang last August were imprisoned, because of their participation in the grand reunification festival, shows a clear picture of anti-reunification acts and human rights violations by South Korean authorities wielding the national security law. The South Korean authorities are now talking about reconciliation and cooperation with the North. But behind the scenes, they are criminalizing contacts and exchanges among the people and other personages of the North and South of Korea and are suppressing patriotic reunification forces by invoking the national security law.

Therefore, as long as the national security law and anti-national and anti-reunification law remains in place, it is impossible to achieve national reconciliation and unity and realize contacts and exchanges between the North and South of Korea. Only when the South Korean authorities take an attitude of national independence and patriotism, instead of depending upon foreign forces and collaborating with them, will North-South relations become characterized by trust and reconciliation and will a decisive breakthrough be opened for reunification.

On 18 April of last year, the respected General Kim Jong Il put forward the five point policy of great national unity to hasten the independent and peaceful reunification of the country. That policy is, first, to base oneself on the principle of national reunification; secondly, to unite the whole nation under the banners of patriotism and national reunification; thirdly, to improve North-South relations; fourthly, to struggle against alien domination and anti-reunification forces; and fifthly, to develop exchanges, contacts and dialogues and to strengthen solidarity and coalition throughout the entire nation.

Great unity of the whole nation would be national reunification. Even though there are still numerous difficulties and obstacles in the way of national reunification, we are optimistic about its prospects. Our nation is one, and so is our motherland. Under the banner of national reunification, our nation will achieve great national unity without fail.

The twenty-first century should be a century of independence, in which "dominationism" and high-handedness are eliminated and the sovereignty of all States is equally respected. In order to bring about a new century of independence and of durable peace, a just international order that never tolerates high-handedness and arbitrariness should be established.

To this end, the principle of respect for sovereignty should be strictly adhered to as the supreme principle in international relations. The assertion that disarmament, human rights and humanitarian issues should be placed above sovereignty should be firmly denounced as a dangerous attempt to justify both high-handedness and arbitrariness. Disputes cannot be properly settled by high-handed and arbitrary measures, such as sanctions and the use of force. They should be resolved through dialogue and negotiation on all accounts.

Countries of Africa and the Middle East that are insisting they should be responsible for resolving their issues through dialogue and negotiations are enjoying the support of the international community. What is important in establishing a just international order is to ensure fairness in the formulation and application of international treaties relating to disarmament, human rights and so forth. In particular, the double standard of abusing international law as a pretext for interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States and the use of force against sovereign States should be strictly rejected.

In order for the United Nations to fulfil its responsibilities and its role in accordance with the Charter, democracy should be practised in United Nations activities. Without enhancing the authority of the General Assembly, and without an early restructuring of the Security Council, the United Nations will be unable to meet the demands of a rapidly changing situation and to cope with new challenges. The authority of the General Assembly, where all Member States are represented and interact democratically on an equal footing, should be enhanced.

If the General Assembly is empowered to deliberate on crucial issues, such as ensuring international peace and security, and finally examines important Security Council resolutions concerning sanctions and the use of force, this will be conducive to ensuring fairness in United Nations activities and preventing arbitrariness by individual countries. The Security Council should be reformed in such a way as to have all regions equally represented in its composition and to ensure full transparency in all of its activities.

In this regard, we oppose under any circumstances the permanent membership of a defeated nation that has not liquidated its past crimes. We are of the view that the proposal put forward by member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement to first increase non-permanent seats, which is relatively easy to agree upon at this stage, deserves sincere consideration. Since the Security Council is taking its actions on behalf of the general United Nations membership, its working methods and, particularly, decision-making processes should be made more transparent for all of the Member States.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to maintain independence, peace and friendship as the fundamental ideals of its foreign policy.

We are convinced that attaching importance to independence, peace and friendship in international

relations conforms with the purposes and principles of the United Nations and makes a contribution to peace and security on the Korean peninsula, in Asia and in the rest of the world.

In conclusion, I assure the Assembly that the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will make sincere efforts for the success of the current session and will extend its active cooperation to the work of the presidency.

The President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand, His Excellency Mr. Surin Pitsuwan.

Mr. Pitsuwan (Thailand): On behalf of the Government and people of Thailand, I extend my warm congratulations to you, Sir, upon your unanimous election to the presidency of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. I am confident that with your leadership and experience this session will complete its work successfully and set the stage for the Millennium Assembly and the millennium summit next year.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Didier Opertti, President of the Assembly at its fifty-third session. My delegation truly appreciates his leadership and his tireless dedication to the heavy responsibilities entrusted to him during the past year.

May I on behalf of the Government and people of Thailand congratulate the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission as new Members of the United Nations, which further reinforces the universal character of the Organization.

As we gather on the threshold of the new millennium, we find the United Nations and the international community are still preoccupied with maintaining international peace and security. Yet this is only one of the many purposes of our Organization; to achieving international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all is no less an important goal in our Charter.

Invariably, the traditional security paradigm predominates in the discussions and ensuing actions regarding international peace and security. A decade after the end of the cold war, global and regional organizations tend to focus their efforts primarily on traditional security concepts and related tools for solving security problems. In South-East Asia, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF), which deals with some aspects of security issues in this traditional sense.

But the traditional concepts of security are woefully inadequate to meet the new challenges faced by mankind. The very narrow scope of its definition serves as an intellectual strait-jacket which limits our ability to conceptualize and respond to new threats of our time.

This fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is being conducted under the menacing shadows of the conflicts in Kosovo and East Timor. All of us are preoccupied with the implications and consequences of the ways in which we choose to handle these conflicts.

More and more, we in the international community are being faced with conflicts within States, not between or among States, as in the past. Rather than State rights, State interests, State sovereignty, we now have to grapple with the defence of the common good, the protection of rights beyond borders and intervention to promote and safeguard humanitarian ideals and objectives.

Our Organization is now being challenged to provide clear guidelines for the collective pursuit of these new lofty goals and this complex agenda. Unless and until we, as the foremost Assembly of mankind, come up with criteria, objective and consensual, the international community will not be able to address the many lurking internal conflicts effectively. The period between now and the millennium summit next September is an opportune time for our collective deliberation on this issue. And I commend the Secretary-General for his leadership role in launching the process of consultation at the beginning of the session. My delegation pledges its full cooperation with him and with all representatives in the Assembly for the successful outcome of this historic search.

But let us not forget that before we can protect and promote those common interests, save rights beyond borders and think about intervention on the ground of humanitarian concerns, we have to make sure that we are in agreement about what it is that we must, that we want to, protect and promote.

I propose that we should begin to change our traditional, exclusive preoccupation with the security and sovereignty of States to serious consideration on the

emerging concept of human security. It is a concept which attempts to take us beyond the traditional meaning of security, by addressing new issues. The scope of what falls within the realm of human security is still not yet well defined, except to place people at the centre of our definition of security. Security is now people-related more than State-related.

One interpretation of human security in vogue includes upholding human dignity, protecting and promoting human rights and use of humanitarian law, shielding women, children and non-combatants from the effects of armed conflicts, and combating terrorism. We have also seen concerted action to meet these objectives through joint efforts to eradicate anti-personnel landmines, prevent the proliferation of small arms and struggle against organized crime. This somewhat limited interpretation of human security emphasizes physical protection of the human person, and strives to provide human beings with freedom from fear. This is a step in the right direction.

But it is not sufficient. We think human security should be more comprehensive. Can we afford to continue to attach less importance to addressing the social and economic dimensions of human security? Can we honestly enjoy genuine security amidst 1.3 billion people who live on less than $1 a day, or another 840 million who remain malnourished? Can we fully enjoy freedom from fear without having freedom from want, which emanates from living in an environment free from infectious disease, illiteracy, poverty, natural disaster and social unrest? If we are to give importance to protecting children from harmful effects during times of war, should we not give equal importance to providing children with basic benefits during times of peace? We cannot turn a blind eye to the need to secure for people their freedom from want. We believe that human beings will begin to enjoy genuine security only if they have a chance to make a living, to be able to stand on their own two feet, to have equal opportunities to develop their livelihoods and to make their own decisions about their own futures. This will not happen so long as people are threatened by socio-economic ills such as poverty, disease, environmental degradation and social vices, including drugs.

The need to pursue human security in such a broader and more comprehensive definition is made even more urgent by the multifaceted challenges that we face from unbridled globalization. Granted, globalization has created many important opportunities and benefits, such as the creation of more competitive world markets, which has led to greater efficiencies in production and faster economic growth. But I ask the question: has globalization helped eradicate poverty in the marginalized subregions of the world, or eliminated social and economic inequities even in the developed world? We cannot deny that uncontrolled market forces and unfettered short-term capital flows, to take but a few examples of globalization, have had devastating consequences on our economies, social cohesion, political stability and cultural identity — in many cases for the worse rather than for the better.

The events of the recent financial crisis in Asia have brought us face-to-face with the worst consequences of globalization. Millions of adults were unemployed and a large number of children were forced to leave school. But, if anything, the crisis has made us even more determined to meet this challenge, which, though primarily financial in nature, has had immense social consequences. We have learned that the multifaceted nature of the challenge of globalization requires a multifaceted response.

In our case, besides the traditional economic reforms and adjustments undertaken, we also sought to focus our efforts on addressing the short-term and long-term threats to the viability and welfare both of individuals and of our society. We therefore give strong priority to promoting the establishment of adequate social safety nets and the development of human resources. This strategy puts people at the centre of our national efforts to bring about our economic revival. I can proudly say that our efforts have finally borne fruit. We have emerged from the crisis more competitive, more resilient and better prepared, economically and socially.

At the global level, I firmly believe that to meet the challenges of globalization and take the most advantages from its benefits, we must join hands to promote globalization with a human face. This is not a new idea. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has spoken of it. The United Nations, particularly the United Nations Development Programme, has long been a proponent of this concept. Unfortunately, when it was introduced some years ago, it was still considered an idea far beyond its time. If we still find such a concept revolutionary, we are indeed behind the times.

We need to ensure that globalization leads us to, among other things, greater equity among peoples and nations; the easing of social tensions and the strengthening of communities; the inclusion of a greater number of economies as stakeholders and co-partners in the building of the global economy; declining poverty and

the reduction of the income gap between the very rich and the very poor; enhanced protection and preservation of our environment; greater protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and, perhaps most importantly and very simply, a better life for all peoples.

The holding of the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development — UNCTAD X — in Thailand in February 2000 will be an important, defining moment in our quest to promote globalization with a human face. We will consider all these challenges together. We hope to be able to tame the tsunami of globalization and turn it into a benevolent force of reconstruction and equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, and not the menacing force of destruction and destabilization it has thus far been.

I am pleased to report that our preparations for UNCTAD X are going well. I wish to take this opportunity to convey the Thai Government's assurance to all of you in the Assembly that Bangkok will be fully prepared for UNCTAD X in February 2000. Thailand, as the host country, strongly encourages all Member States to consider sending to Bangkok delegations at the highest level possible.

Joining hands to promote globalization with a human face is a distinct contribution to promoting human security. The United Nations is already playing a leadership role in realizing this goal at the global level. But the United Nations cannot do it alone. It needs to forge a partnership with the non-governmental sector, especially the private sector and civil society, and with other international organizations. In a sense, our endeavour to define and, indeed, to promote human security has philosophical and practical implications — both positive and negative — for us as sovereign States and for the United Nations as the leading global multilateral Organization. We are embarking on an effort to define what the key role of the United Nations will be in the next millennium. I urge all of us to contribute to this important mission together.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, His Excellency Youssouf Ouedraogo.

Mr. Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso) *(spoke in French)*: Your brilliant election, Mr. President, to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session pays tribute to your personal merits and your eminent qualities as a diplomat, and to your country, Namibia, a country that is to us a symbol of the struggle against oppression. First of all, allow me to address our most sincere and warm congratulations to you. Your country and Burkina Faso share the same ideals and values, and a similar vision of the future of Africa and the world. Suffice it to say that we extend to you in advance our willingness and cooperation for the success of your mission.

We must also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, who so brilliantly discharged his important responsibilities during this particularly trying year. I pay tribute as well to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose work at the helm of the United Nations deserves our appreciation and our fullest support.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the three new Members that have joined the great family of the United Nations — Tonga, Nauru and Kiribati.

This session of the General Assembly — the last of the century — is beginning at a time when recurring and persistent inter-State and inter-ethnic conflict and hostility are characteristic of the international scene.

The globalization of the international economy and the liberalization of world trade appear to have worsened the economic and social differences between peoples. The lofty objectives of our Organization — the promotion of peace, security, justice and equality — seem to be receding into the distance.

We are faced with increasing challenges, which is making the task of the United Nations more difficult. And yet we sense that the coming millennium will be a time of growth for our peoples, in particular those of the developing countries.

The waning century threw down every possible challenge, but it also gave rise to great hopes. It has been one of the most productive as regards legal instruments aimed at enhancing the protection and promotion of human rights. Nevertheless, grave dangers emerged during this period that came close to jeopardizing humankind's very existence. The memory of the two great wars remains very much alive.

It must be underscored that the United Nations — born of the general upheaval of the post-war period and charged with working towards peace and a genuine collective security for our world — has accomplished a great deal, with the assistance of regional or subregional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of American States, the

Association of South-East Asian Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and so on.

But despite all these efforts, the quest for peace remains an immense and difficult undertaking. On the international scene, wars, conflicts and confrontations of all stripes continue to rage, wiping out any progress made in the field of development.

In the Middle East, the level of tension between the parties remains very high, even though recent political changes have given rise to hopes of a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, particularly since the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September last.

In an international situation so fraught with conflict, we can only rejoice at seeing the spectre of war, which had seemed inevitable, recede from East Timor thanks to the wisdom and realism of the parties to this painful conflict.

I cannot fail to mention the military intervention of the NATO countries in Yugoslavia and more specifically in Kosovo, an operation whose legitimacy was supposedly based on the right of humanitarian intervention. But my country, Burkina Faso, is among those that believe that such an intervention should take place only on the basis of a clear and precise mandate and under the supervision of the United Nations.

Though the objective of this type of intervention — protecting a victimized minority — may seem defensible, the manner in which it was carried out is a cause for concern because it represents a challenge to the United Nations and to the basic norms of international law. Burkina Faso is gratified that the United Nations has taken up its proper role in the resolution of this conflict.

But Africa is undoubtedly the continent that has suffered the most from these crises. Though peace has been restored in Guinea-Bissau, and in Sierra Leone the Lomé Agreement, signed on 7 July 1999 with the active participation of Burkina Faso, has put an end to the gunfire, we must continue tirelessly to strive to resolve the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the Horn of Africa and in Angola.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a solution can be found if security issues, which remain the essential concerns of the various States involved in the conflict, are taken into consideration. Accordingly, Burkina Faso considers that the Lusaka agreements must be accepted by all of the parties if indeed they wish to give peace a chance.

Turning to the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, President Blaise Compaoré, during his tenure as the head of the high-level OAU delegation and in close cooperation with the United Nations, made every effort to promote a peaceful settlement of this conflict, in conformity with the mandate he was entrusted with at Ouagadougou by the thirty-fourth Summit of Heads of State or Government, in June 1998.

Our efforts led to the acceptance by both parties of the Ouagadougou framework agreement, and, at the thirty-fifth OAU Summit, held in Algiers, of the modalities for the implementation of that agreement. We are convinced that President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the current Chairman of the OAU, to whom we have passed the torch, will strive to ensure a successful outcome to this delicate situation. In doing so he will enjoy the continuing and vigorous support of the OAU Secretary General, Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, and the cooperation of the United Nations and all of the States that have played a very positive and discreet role in finding a pacific solution to the conflict between these two brotherly countries. To this end, he will require the cooperation of both parties and the support of all, particularly the United Nations.

The fratricidal conflict in Angola has lasted more than two decades, despite all of the sanctions and measures taken against Mr. Jonas Savimbi and his movement, UNITA. Burkina Faso is convinced that, as in other cases — particularly in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo — it is only through a dialogue between the parties that a just and lasting solution can be found.

It is clear that, because of their increasingly complex and interrelated nature, the various conflicts I have mentioned cannot be resolved in a just and lasting way unless the efforts of all are conjoined. This includes not only the parties to the conflict and the international community — meaning the United Nations — but also the regional and subregional organizations.

In this respect, we noted, throughout our mandate as Chairman of the OAU, the determination and commitment of this Organization fully to discharge its responsibilities, as evidenced by the various initiatives it has undertaken.

We stand convinced that Africa has resolutely considered the serious consequences these multiple conflicts entail for the economic and human development of its population. Accordingly, at the thirty-fifth OAU Summit in Algiers, it took the courageous and historic decision of declaring that the year 2000 would be a year of peace and security throughout the continent.

Of course, we know full well that in order for that objective to be attained, the support of the international community is crucial, not only at the political level, where its backing will be needed for the implementation of our decisions and resolutions, but also at the equally important level of logistics and material support, technical assistance and humanitarian considerations.

But any peace is fragile that is not backed by genuine disarmament. That is why we support all international initiatives in this field, in particular the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

My country has joined in the fight against anti-personnel mines by signing and ratifying the relevant Convention. Burkina Faso is gratified at the growing support of the international community for the initiative of the Economic Community of West African States relating to a moratorium on the production and transfer of light weapons. Together with other members of the international community, my country is also participating in peacekeeping operations, in particular in the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, it is distressing to note that the world economy is still dominated and controlled by a minority of States that manipulate its rules and the way it operates in their own interests and to the detriment of the interests of the great majority — the countries that make up the South.

With regard to social development, poverty has continued to increase in developing countries, where about 1.5 billion people — one quarter of the world's population — are living on less than $1 per capita per day. Food security is far from guaranteed in those countries, while in the affluent countries food is destroyed on a huge scale in order to stabilize prices. The scarcity of drinking water supplies and medical services condemns a third of humanity to a life expectancy of no more than 40 years. Illiteracy greatly limits the access of the poorest to knowledge and, by extension, to information about how their countries are run. The most disadvantaged and vulnerable strata — women, children and elderly people — do not fully enjoy the benefits of a legal protection system.

At a more general level, there are unacceptable disparities in international economic relations between the industrialized and the developing countries. The latter are becoming increasingly vulnerable because of the chronic structural imbalance in trade with the developed countries. Despite the decisions taken by the ministerial conferences of the World Trade Organization, the integration of the less advanced countries into the multilateral trading system is still an issue, particularly with regard to the special and differentiated treatment that should be granted to those countries. The greatest challenge in the twenty-first century will undoubtedly be the struggle against the marginalization of the countries of the South.

The burden of debt remains a constant concern, too, despite the initiative of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative and the important decisions taken by the Group of Seven Summit in Cologne, which I welcome.

In order to promote the genuine and lasting human development to which all developing countries aspire, we must work for greater justice and equity in international trade, through the implementation of various measures, including price stabilization and export guarantees for the products of developing countries through the revaluation of raw materials and the stabilization of export earnings; index-linking of the prices of raw materials to those of industrial products; free access for the products the South to northern markets through the elimination of protectionist measures; reform of the Bretton Woods institutions to bring them into line with the needs and preoccupations of the developing countries; and the promotion of a genuine North-South dialogue. In this respect, Burkina Faso welcomes with interest and satisfaction the European initiative to hold an economic summit next year for the European Union countries and their African partners.

As everyone knows, we can make many plans, have many ambitious dreams and imagine all sorts of transformations for our world. But if we do not place justice, equity and solidarity at the heart of all our projects, they will remain fantasies. Justice demands, for example, that we not starve a population through the use of international sanctions in order to punish its Government. Since I am touching upon that subject, I would like to reaffirm our full solidarity with the Libyan

Arab Jamahiriya, and I hope that, as a result of the concessions made by that country with regard to the Lockerbie affair, the unfair sanctions against the brotherly Libyan people will be lifted for good. Since the historic decision at Ouagadougou, this requirement has become imperative, in our view.

In this context, the issue of the Republic of China on Taiwan also deserves attention. In the interests of equity and of the principle of universality, Burkina Faso believes that it is unfair virtually to ostracize 22 million Chinese people. That is why we firmly support the initiative to create a study group to examine the particular and exceptional situation of the Republic of China on Taiwan so as to determine how that entity could be represented in the United Nations.

In that connection, in the interests of justice within international relations, we must restructure the Organization so that we can better respond to the demands of our time and the expectations of humanity. If the United Nations is to be more democratic and more just, such reform must go to the heart of its main body, the Security Council, whose composition and operating methods must be reviewed and corrected. The operational capacities of the Organization — the structures and activities linked to the promotion of economic and social development — must also be strengthened.

Burkina Faso believes the human being to be the supreme measure of all things. That is why human rights and the dignity of humankind are at the centre of our concerns. In fact, since 1991, my country has been steadfastly undertaking an irreversible process of democratization that has led to several rounds of municipal, legislative and presidential elections under conditions recognized by international observers as being calm and unbiased. The process is being consolidated and the culture of democracy and citizenship in a republican system is well under way. The stability and security of our country in the current turbulent environment bear witness to that fact.

We believe that no price can be placed on democracy and freedom. That is why we will spare no effort to strengthen and extend those values. Burkina Faso intends to make a modest contribution to building a more human world of greater justice and solidarity, because we are convinced that the new international order to which we all aspire requires that political, economic and social forces throughout the world join hands and become catalysts of progress for the benefit of humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, His Excellency Mr. Louis Michel.

Mr. Michel (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I should like first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly and to thank you for having accepted the weighty task that you will be carrying out during this session. We also wish to express our best wishes to your country, Namibia, which you so ably represent. We also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Opertti, for the manner in which he guided our work during the previous session.

I should also like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere congratulations to the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission to our Organization.

My statement is in line with the statement made here by the Presidency of the European Union. I wish merely to highlight some of the issues that are particularly important for us.

Early in the month of August, two young African children, Yaguine and Fodé, were found dead, stowed away in the landing gear of a Sabena aeroplane, victims of an idealism and an innocence that led them to embark on a reckless voyage in search of the mirages of western society.

Yaguine and Fodé left us a moving message, of which I would like to quote some passages here:

> "To the people in charge in Europe: it is to your solidarity and to your kindness that we make an appeal for help for Africa ... We are suffering enormously ... We have war, disease ... We have schools, but in order to get a good education and good teaching, one needs large amounts of money; and our parents are poor.
>
> "So, we Africans, especially African children and young people, ask you to create a great and effective organization for Africa ... We need you to fight poverty".

The great organization of which Yaguine and Fodé dreamed is here before me in its most universal form. It was conceived from the outset for the maintenance of peace and for economic and social development. The authors of the Charter regarded those two aspects as

inseparable. Over the last decade, this great Organization has succeeded in laying a worldwide foundation for economic and social values aimed at creating a more civilized world, a world in which globalization has gradually come to the fore.

Here I am thinking of the discrete but tenacious work at the great United Nations conferences and summits to find new directions for development. That significant work must be continued and consolidated. The universal commitments made at Jomtien for education, at Rio de Janeiro for the environment, at Vienna for human rights, at Copenhagen for social development, at Cairo for population and development, at Beijing for women, at Rome for hunger and at Istanbul for human settlements constitute irreversible gains for mankind. It is gratifying that the concerns debated and the conclusions adopted at those conferences have increasingly become the inspiration for our national policies and are helping to bring about the indispensable convergence among those policies.

But the tragedy of Yaguine and Fodé brings us face to face with the harsh reality of unbalanced development. As I speak, 1.3 billion women and men are surviving — or trying to survive — on less than one dollar per day; 840 million of them, including 160 million children, suffer daily from hunger or malnutrition. Even more serious, as those two teenagers remind us, 260 million children have no access to primary or secondary school because of a lack of means. Every day, 250 million children go to work instead of to school. At the dawn of the third millennium, it is increasingly difficult for our civilization to tolerate such social and human marginalization and such a lack of solidarity, in particular for our children.

We must forge stronger solidarity within the United Nations. We must restore humanism to its rightful place in international relations. For this fight against poverty and this campaign for emancipation to succeed, we must agree to a decisive review of the mechanism that underlies the economic fluctuation, that causes financial tension and its attendant social consequences, and that tolerates massive exploitation of the weakest by forces that are often impersonal and unidentifiable.

Hence, we are deeply convinced that we must restore the primacy of political leadership in our globalized society. We must endeavour without hidden agendas to organize a new world political order. We need stronger and more coherent United Nations action for economic and social development, which requires the use of all available global tools for economic, financial and commercial governance. This means we must be more determined to restoring the primacy of policy and no longer to permit democratic legitimacy to be circumvented or even flouted by selfish or speculative interests. The rights of peoples must always prevail over the power of money.

Belgium will support United Nations efforts to restore the Organization's mission to protect against the unacceptable side-effects of globalization. In that spirit, my country attaches great importance to the success of the coming Millennium Assembly. In that context, Belgium is pleased that it will serve as host to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in the spring of 2001, which will bring together in Brussels all development partners. We hope that this major event will lead to a renewed commitment to the integration of these countries in the world economy on the basis of concrete and quantifiable objectives. The Belgian Government, which recently came into office, has clearly expressed its political will gradually to increase our funding of bilateral partnerships and cooperation. We shall pay particular attention to the quality and the coherent implementation of the projects we sponsor.

I express the wish that this Assembly session be conducted under the banner of Africa. Your stimulating opening statement, Mr. President, and the addresses by President Mbeki of South Africa and by President Bouteflika of Algeria, sent a strong message in that regard. We Belgians have a traditional interest in the political, economic and development prospects of Central Africa. Belgium must reestablish the bonds with that region which history and experience have bestowed upon it. This also implies responsibilities which my Government will endeavour to shoulder in a responsible and coherent manner. I am thinking in particular of the twofold task of the United Nations as an organization both for the maintenance of peace and for the promotion of development. I also have in mind human rights issues, of which my Government is particularly aware.

Against this backdrop, the new Belgian Government has placed cooperation with Central Africa at the top of its agenda. To us, it is important that peace and stability should return to Central Africa. The Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement offers hope. It requires the political will of the various parties concerned to address the root causes of the present conflict and to seek solutions at a regional level. A significant effort by the international community will be necessary to encourage and support them. My country will do its share, and will intensify its direct

contacts and its financial support. Belgium has responded to the appeal of the Security Council by placing liaison officers at the disposal of the Secretary-General. They will be deployed in accordance with Security Council resolution 1258 (1999) of 6 August 1999.

It goes without saying that we fully respect the wish of African leaders that they should find their own political solutions to the conflicts that undermine the continent. But this can imply no ambiguity about the roles of the Security Council and of the General Assembly. Nor does it mean that the rest of the world should refrain from action: achieving peace in the Great Lakes region will require tremendous efforts and resources.

Here we must think about concluding a true partnership pact with the countries of Central Africa. Inspired by the Stability Pact for the Balkans, this would form part of a genuine strategy for cooperation among countries. With the support of the major financial institutions, such a pact could revitalize the economic mechanisms of partner countries and reinvigorate their social and democratic development. We believe such s partnership pact should be based on the voluntary and mutually respectful cooperation of each African and non-African signatory country and should in no way be construed as an attempt at neo-colonial domineering of that part of the world.

Other regions of Africa deserve more attention and effort on the part of the international community. I think in particular of the bloody conflict which has plunged Angola into unspeakable humanitarian tragedy. I also think of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which must be prevented from extending into Somalia. In Sierra Leone, the efforts of neighbouring countries, which Belgium and other partners have supported, give reason for optimism. We also hope that Guinea-Bissau will regain civil peace. But much remains to be done to improve the situation of the peoples of southern Sudan and of Somalia.

Whatever the media's focus, now turned towards other parts of the world, it is important that we do not forget the suffering of men, women and especially children of those countries of Africa, who aspire to education, health and development. The new international policies, based more on balance and on the sharing of prosperity, should be directed towards them, too.

I turn briefly to North Africa. The presidency of the European Union recalled that the Maghreb countries are experiencing significant growth. They remain an essential partner for Europe and for world peace, prosperity and development. Economic, social, cultural and political ties with the southern Mediterranean basin will have to be strengthened in the coming months and years.

I also hope that the international Community will fulfil its commitment to support the Middle East peace process. There, too, it will be a matter of releasing the financial and human resources to ensure the economic, social and democratic development of the various regions and peoples who are committed to peace. My country is ready to respond to calls for cooperation in this regard.

There is another region where the United Nations has been called upon to play a crucial and difficult role. The Kosovo crisis has implications for the security of my country and Europe as a whole. It also obliges us to ask a sensitive question about the limits to the right of the international community to intervene in the internal affairs of a State.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention has appreciably reinforced the idea that moral and ethical considerations are in the process of overshadowing the traditional concept of national sovereignty in international relations. If there is one lesson for our Organization to learn from the twentieth century, it is that for no State can the massacre of its own people be considered an "internal affair", under any pretext. This legal formalism would ultimately amount to admitting that, as the head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Bernard Kouchner has said, it would be "legitimate, although not elegant, to massacre one's own people".

Yet the Security Council is well-equipped to deal with massive violations of human rights. Article 42 of the United Nations Charter allows the Council to qualify such violations as a threat to international peace and security and to authorize armed intervention, as it has on several occasions — for example, in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991; in Somalia in 1992; in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1994; and in Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1997.

If the Security Council could not fully play its role at the beginning of the Kosovo crisis, this was due less to a divergence of views between States over the essence of the problem than because there was a rift between the advocates of the right of humanitarian intervention and the defenders of the traditional legal system, which regards national sovereignty as the absolute foundation of international relations. My country deeply regrets that a

potential double veto constituted an insurmountable obstacle that was inappropriate given the extreme urgency of the situation. We hope that resorting to force without the Council's approval will not constitute a precedent. The world needs an international legal order that prevails over the law of the jungle. In this respect, we all hope that resolution 1244 (1999) signals a return to international legality.

Belgium welcomes the decisive attitude of the Security Council regarding East Timor. We hope for a speedy restoration of normality there, with the return of its inhabitants, reconstruction of the country and the establishment of a state of law resulting from the expressed will of its people.

Here it is opportune to recall the urgent need for the international community to provide itself with the tools needed to prevent and punish barbaric acts. We need a tribunal charged with prosecuting those responsible for the gravest crimes affecting the whole international community. The adoption in Rome of the Statute of the International Criminal Court is an important landmark. I appeal to all States to sign and ratify it so that the Court can start to operate as soon as possible. Belgium's ratification of the Statute is imminent. This new tribunal must be endowed with the human and material means necessary for the accomplishment of its mission.

This leads me to the issue of United Nations reform, and primarily the reform of the Security Council.

For six years a Working Group under the guidance of the President of the General Assembly has attempted, with more or less success, to ascertain which reforms would make it possible to re-gild the coat of arms of the Security Council. In spite of the efforts of successive Presidents, little progress has been made. Nevertheless, the scope of the issue and possible improvements have been identified. I believe that new momentum can come only from a new determination on the part of our Governments.

In the view of my country, the Security Council is an anachronistic reflection of the world of 1946. In 53 years the number of independent countries has grown fourfold, and new great Powers can, whether on economic, demographic or geopolitical grounds, legitimately claim a larger share of international responsibility.

The reasons for reform are evident. Lack of it, continuance of the status quo and opposition to change involve the following dangers.

Countries which are legitimate candidates for a permanent seat on the Security Council, frustrated in their ambitions, will be less inclined to contribute to the collective effort to maintain peace, prevent conflict and give multilateral development aid. Equally, other countries, unable to justifiably claim a permanent seat, will be deprived of participation in shouldering global responsibilities, because of their number and the lack of objective rotation criteria. That will bring about a loss of representativeness and legitimacy, and ultimately of the Council's authority.

My country chairs a group of 10 Member States seeking a solution that can command the broadest possible support. In spite of the obstacles, we intend to persevere.

The reforms that we are considering are not limited to the Security Council: they also aim at rendering the machinery of the United Nations more effective and efficient. I pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who has thrown himself into the task with great determination.

The United Nations continues to be an indispensable Organization. It must be strengthened so that it can carry out the tasks and responsibilities given it by the Charter. Reform is therefore essential to strengthen the mechanisms for the solidarity and harmonious development to which we all aspire.

This reform must be accompanied by a sound financial outlook. There has been no improvement over the last 12 months; this situation must be redressed. Belgium, like the many other States which pay their contributions on time and unconditionally, calls for all Member States to do the same. It will be understood, of course, that here I am looking particularly towards Washington. Belgium, a friend and ally of the United States, reaffirms that it is essential that that country play its role in the United Nations. We all need the United States, but it must shoulder its responsibilities, including its financial responsibilities, within our Organization.

So far I have mostly spoken of what is not working. But there are many areas where progress, even considerable progress, is being made. The Organization has played a considerable role in giving an ethical dimension to the criteria governing international relations. My country welcomes this. As the first victim of chemical weapons — gas used on the battlefields of the Yser — Belgium was a passionate advocate of the process

that led to the conclusion and the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Similarly, we are supporting the efforts to combat biological and bacteriological weapons and the fight to abolish anti-personnel mines. We are also presently engaged in efforts to reduce the spread of small arms.

The anarchistic accumulation of small arms and the scourge of anti-personnel mines remain among the most acute problems at this close of the century. These weapons exacerbate conflicts and are instruments of death and terror, in Africa as well as in Asia, Latin America and the Balkans. Nor do the societies of Western Europe and North America escape this cancer, the full extent of which has yet to be felt.

Several initiatives have been taken to tackle these problems, and my country was fully involved in them. By way of example I would like to mention the Brussels conference of October 1998 and the Code of Conduct and the common action of the European Union, as well as our participation in and financial support for the expert groups set up by the Secretary General.

We will continue our policy of prevention and reduction with regard to accumulations of small arms, as well as our fight for the abolition of anti-personnel mines.

In general, in the appropriate forums we will continue to take initiatives to promote arms control and disarmament. I am thinking, for example, of the reinforcement of the Biological Weapons Convention, limitations on arms-trafficking, the intensification of the fight against the violation of embargoes on weapons transfers and the fight against the increase of nuclear arsenals.

From economic and social development to disarmament or humanitarian intervention, there is a central theme that underlies all our actions: human rights. It has become clearer and clearer in the past few years that human rights are intertwined with the promotion of international peace and security, economic prosperity, sustainable development and social justice.

In all the reforms of the activities and the structures of the United Nations that have been carried out with the impetus of the Secretary-General, the promotion of human rights is a cross-cutting theme involving all the organizations and agencies that operate on a global scale. Belgium supports this global and integrated approach without reservations; but the task is immense. Thus, it is in the interest of the United Nations to ensure the collaboration of regional organizations, whose competencies and potential in this field can help in the achievement of these common objectives.

The inaugural address of the new Belgian Government unequivocally put human rights at the top of its agenda and announced its intention of pursuing an active policy within all the relevant international organizations.

I would like to pay particular homage to our Secretary-General, whose patience and tact have often made the difference in extremely difficult circumstances. My Government remains a steadfast supporter of all his initiatives to prepare our Organization for the challenges, known and unknown, that lie ahead in the next century.

Through the Secretary-General I would like to pay special tribute to the United Nations personnel, and particularly to all those who died on the field of honour in humanitarian or peacekeeping missions. Every year the list of victims gets longer. My country appeals to the global conscience to respect United Nations personnel and to ensure that crimes against them do not go unpunished.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that the actions of the Secretary-General will make our Organization more credible and more effective, for the United Nations remains the indispensable universal instrument to achieve our common goals. It is a beacon in an increasingly interdependent world, a source of hope for the Yaguines and Fodés of all the continents.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, His Excellency Mr. Juan Gabriel Valdés.

Mr. Valdés (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like first of all to express to you, Sir, our warm congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We join the earlier delegations in wishing you success in the important task of guiding our debates.

I would like to express to your predecessor, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, Mr. Didier Opertti, our gratitude for his outstanding leadership as President of the Assembly at its fifty-third session.

I also wish to convey very special greetings to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to express our deep appreciation for the work that he has done and our firm support for his efforts to achieve peace in a year that has been of critical importance for the United Nations.

Chile extends a hearty welcome to the new Member States of our Organization, Kiribati, Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, fraternal countries of the Pacific community.

Globalization and interdependence require new and stronger international institutions. As the international environment becomes increasingly complex and difficult, the United Nations, with all its limitations, remains the only global actor capable of addressing not only the problems of cooperation and global conflict, but also issues that, by their very nature, are no longer within the exclusive competence of States.

The expansion of the international agenda and the need for collective management of the problems of interdependence are the impetus for this trend. The issue of democracy, or rather of the lack of democracy, has ceased to be exclusively a sovereign matter for countries to deal with; it has become a universal concern that no Government can ignore. Protection of the environment has an indisputable international dimension, inasmuch as issues of vital importance for our future, such as climate change, the pollution and over-exploitation of the oceans, the deterioration of the ozone layer and growing desertification, all require global remedies. Increasingly strict international regimes are being established for the regulation and prohibition of weapons of mass destruction and for the elimination of anti-personnel landmines. The fight against drug-trafficking can be truly effective only if it is waged within a framework of close regional and international cooperation, based on the principle of shared responsibility. Such moving issues as the treatment of refugees, the fight against hunger and major epidemics fall squarely within the scope of multilateral action. The Government of Chile enthusiastically supports this trend towards a new multilateralism.

The crisis in Kosovo revealed one of the most serious weaknesses and contradictions of the United Nations. The policies of ethnic cleansing supported by the Serbian leadership in that region required an immediate and vigorous response by the international community.

It was truly regrettable that our Organization was prevented from the outset from taking action with the vigour that the situation required. It was also regrettable that the solution to the crisis was found outside the appropriate framework of United Nations mechanisms and in contravention of the principles of the Charter. There is clearly a responsibility shared by all the permanent members of the Security Council for the inadequate functioning of the mechanisms of collective security. Once again, it was evident that the veto or the threat of its use can reduce to impotence the world's principal organ of collective security. Once again, it was evident that, when this occurs, a vacuum is created that can lead to the unilateral use of force without the prior authorization of the Security Council.

More recently, the United Nations has had to face a new challenge, a fresh humanitarian tragedy that it had to stop at all costs. I refer to the crisis in East Timor. Chile supported with hope and enthusiasm the holding of the referendum on 30 August, which was made possible by the significant agreement reached between Indonesia and Portugal under United Nations auspices.

A Chilean delegation of two distinguished parliamentarians was able to observe the successful organization of the electoral process and the admirable work of the United Nations volunteers and staff. They also witnessed the onset of the incidents that culminated in the massacre of which we are all aware. These acts are totally unacceptable. We are pleased that the Republic of Indonesia has requested the intervention of the United Nations to put an end to violence on the island. We are encouraged by the fact that, after so many unnecessary deaths, it has been possible to organize a multinational force under the efficient leadership of Australia.

I wish to reiterate and reaffirm the commitment of Chile to the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. Without interruption since 1949, my country has lent its cooperation to several of these operations. Today, we are expanding our participation in this field and have decided to contribute to the peacekeeping forces deployed in Kosovo and in East Timor. In February, Chile formally joined the reserve forces system. We have already identified the personnel to be kept at the ready in terms of military units, police monitors and civilian experts.

I wish to stress the importance that we attach to the implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which Chile has signed and for which it is

completing the formalities required for its approval by our National Congress. In keeping with the spirit and purpose of that instrument, I reiterate my country's commitment not to produce, export, import or lay any new anti-personnel landmines, as we demonstrated last April in our official declaration of a unilateral moratorium.

My country notes with optimism and hope the positive signs that have recently emerged with regard to the long-awaited resumption of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian people. Chile has resolutely supported this process from the very beginning and noted with great concern its virtual paralysis. We hope that the Israelis and the Palestinians alike will have the courage and resolve to opt unambiguously for dialogue and peace.

Chile expresses its concern and frustration at the obstacles that continue to block the self-determination referendum provided for under the United Nations Settlement Plan for Western Sahara. We hope that the date that has been set will be honoured so that the Sahraoui people can have the opportunity to express their preference in a free, informed and transparent manner.

Latin America has continued to make significant contributions to international peace and stability throughout the year. A final settlement has been achieved in the border conflict between two fraternal peoples on our continent: Ecuador and Peru. As one of the four guarantor countries of the 1941 treaty by which those two countries are bound, Chile is pleased to have contributed to the rapprochement between the parties and to have facilitated the dialogue that led this year to the settlement of their differences and the signing of a peace agreement.

The border between Argentina and Chile is one of the longest in the world. Numerous disagreements have arisen in the past over its demarcation. Thanks to the political will of the two nations, it has been possible to find solutions to each one of these problems. I have the deep satisfaction of announcing to this Assembly that we have reached a settlement with Argentina on the last remaining border dispute between our peoples. Our Parliaments have adopted the Campo de Hielo Sur agreement and we can now concentrate without distraction on the task of developing a relationship of peace, friendship and cooperation and a true strategic alliance between our two countries.

Four years have passed since, on the occasion of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Member States undertook to intensify efforts to reform and democratize the Organization's structures in order to equip it to deal with the new and complex challenges that it faces in a constantly changing international environment. We must acknowledge, however, that little progress has been made. It has become a truism to point to the changes that have occurred in the international system set up after the Second World War. Less frequently mentioned is the fact that the institutions have not kept pace with these changes.

Chile has stressed the need for due importance to be given to the process of reforming the General Assembly as the prime deliberative and decision-making body of the entire system. It is only here that all Member States are represented on an equal footing.

On this occasion, we reaffirm our position that the reform of the Security Council must take into account such criteria and principles as the sovereign equality of States, equitable geographic representation and the need to create conditions for a functioning that would guarantee greater transparency and democracy in the working methods and procedures of that body. The persistence of the veto — which, moreover, can be exercised without any public justification — represents a serious obstacle to the achievement of substantive agreements. It is a fact that most of the obstacles to the admission of new permanent members are directly related to the right of veto that accompanies such membership.

Clearly, the loosening of regulations that govern the free circulation across borders of the knowledge, goods and capital that are characteristic elements of globalization has entailed significant benefits for our societies. It is also true, however, that globalization has thrown up new challenges and, in some cases, new risks, particularly those associated with capital movement.

The international financial crisis of recent years has demonstrated our ongoing vulnerability to events that we cannot control and for which we are not entirely responsible. Following the near collapse of the international financial system, the demand for structural reform has increased exponentially. Today, while the situation appears more hopeful, nothing has changed in substance. The systemic risks remain. We must relaunch, with fresh impetus and vigour, the necessary reform process to stabilize the international financial system in the future.

Capital flows far exceed the value of world trade. It is ironic that, while we have devoted so much effort to

establishing new trade regimes throughout the world, so little has been done in the field of international finance. The point is certainly not to impede the international flow of capital, but to establish an appropriate international framework to address the problems to which it may give rise. We cannot continue to be passive spectators as financial crises interrupt world growth and limit the development of our countries.

It is also essential that we put all our energies into the new round of multilateral trade negotiations that is just beginning. The multilateral trade system, reflected most accurately in the World Trade Organization, must be strengthened with a view to ensuring sustained and genuinely equitable growth for all countries. It is essential that the new round soon to start in Seattle be balanced so as to reflect the interests of developed and developing countries alike. We also hope that it will be comprehensive in its thematic coverage. We oppose a limited approach in the form of sectoral trade negotiations.

In the framework of the agendas of United Nations summits and conferences, the closing decade has witnessed gatherings at the highest level to consider the urgent social problems that beset mankind. From Copenhagen to Rio de Janeiro, Beijing to Cairo, Vienna to New York, the United Nations has accomplished a superlative task in reviewing problems and adopting programmes of action in the most important social spheres. In this connection, we attach the greatest importance to the follow-up and implementation of agreements emanating from the World Summit for Social Development. A special session of the General Assembly, to be held in Geneva next June, should renew the international community's commitment to the process begun in Copenhagen.

We welcome the recent Convention of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the prohibition of the most severe forms of child labour. We are confident that that organization, under the leadership of our fellow Chilean, Mr. Juan Somavía, will play an increasingly relevant role in the new international social agenda.

Violations of the basic rights of individuals can no longer be considered an exclusively domestic problem of a country. Protection of these rights is the inescapable task of the international community. This has been recognized by Chile, which, since regaining democracy in 1990, has firmly and sincerely supported the establishment of effective universal and regional regimes for the protection of human rights. We must bear in mind that the international regime for the protection of human rights is fragmentary and evolving. It consists of a set of standards and institutions that are gradually beginning to be applied with many gaps and imperfections. It should also be noted that this regime is being applied within the context of a certain international reality characterized by important differences in the relative power of countries and by selective and sometimes paternalistic practices.

Genocide and massive violations of human rights are destined to fall within the competence of international tribunals. Chile welcomes that tendency, but it also recognizes that we are now in a transitional stage of the process of globalization of justice. In this stage the norms of jurisdictions are not clear and are subject to various interpretations, including some that may be arbitrary and erroneous.

Chile regained its democracy almost 10 years ago. My Government represents those who fought for nearly two decades to restore Chile's tradition of freedom. Our economy has experienced remarkable growth during this period. We scrupulously respect human rights. We participate avidly in furthering Latin American integration. We are adhering to the new regimes being established by the international community in very diverse spheres.

We have also faced the dilemma of administering justice with respect to violations of human rights that occurred in the past in our country. This choice has led to considerable tension. Many countries that began the process of transition to democracy in more favourable conditions than Chile's preferred to circumvent such tensions by refraining from prosecuting very serious crimes that occurred during the previous regimes.

In these circumstances, what grounds would exist for the judiciary of a third State to exercise jurisdiction with respect to acts that are currently the subject of proceedings in the court of the State in which those acts were committed? There is no denial of justice in Chile. We do not accept impunity for human rights violations. The Government has initiated a broad dialogue to deal with the consequences of the most serious human rights violations that occurred in our country, particularly the tragedy of those who were arrested and disappeared. At present nearly 300 cases relating to human rights violations committed during the authoritarian regime that governed our country between 1973 and 1990 are being tried in Chilean courts. In several cases, the Chilean courts have convicted the accused and have sentenced

them to prison terms that are now being served in penitentiaries.

We would understand if the organized international community attempted to administer justice in countries in which the rule of law did not prevail or where the most basic human rights continued to be trampled. But in a democratic State the task of administering justice must be undertaken by that State and its institutions.

The Government of Chile considers it highly undesirable that judges of other countries should claim jurisdiction to intervene directly in that process. This claim to jurisdiction, based on the principle of separation of powers, means plainly and simply ignoring the principle of the juridical equality of States. Interference in matters within our country's jurisdiction is inappropriate and misplaced and is tantamount to a lack of respect for our State of law and our democracy. Today this interference affects Chile and other fraternal countries of the Southern Cone of Latin America. Tomorrow it may extend to the rest of the international community, leading to juridical chaos and competing judicial claims that will end up damaging the international relations of many of our countries.

But our reaction to these imperfections and discriminatory practices is not to seek refuge in outdated principles and notions. On the contrary: we must move forward towards a clear, orderly and non-discriminatory regime, such as the one envisaged in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. The establishment of a permanent organ designed to exercise criminal jurisdiction over persons accused of any of the crimes over which it has competence will have the virtue of discouraging both improper internal procedures that guarantee the impunity of the perpetrators and attempts by judges in other countries to make themselves the righteous of the world.

I wish to conclude by expressing prudent optimism for the future of our Organization. Many States and other actors, such as non-governmental organizations that make up our increasingly vibrant international civil society, would like to raise the standing of the United Nations. We hope that the Millennium Assembly, to which we have given all our support, will become the symbol of a renewed and much stronger United Nations as it faces the new century.

The President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta, His Excellency The Honourable Joseph Borg.

Mr. Borg (Malta): I join other delegations in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the General Assembly. Your experience and diplomatic skills will undoubtedly guide us successfully through the fifty-fourth session. I would also like to express our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, who displayed such competence and ability in conducting our work during the past year. We would also like to express our deep sense of satisfaction and gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his incessant diplomatic intervention to help resolve conflicts in various parts of the globe.

May I also take this opportunity to offer our most sincere congratulations to the three new Members of this Organization, the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga and the Republic of Kiribati. I should also add that Malta already cooperates closely with these three new Members through our joint membership of the Commonwealth.

For over half a century the United Nations has been instrumental in fostering a culture of partnership among States. The foundation and survival of a universal Organization entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of social justice, freedom and human rights is an unprecedented achievement in the history of mankind. Undeniably, great strides have been made by this Organization in helping forge swords into ploughshares through enhanced cooperation between its Member States. We have striven individually and collectively, painfully at times and imperfectly at others, towards a process of political, social, economic and technological evolution. Globalization has become a central concept in the way we view the world. Interdependence has consequently become the norm.

Overshadowing such progress, however, are the armed conflicts, economic imbalances and social dislocation that we still face. Events in our days show that gross violations of human rights and disregard for humanitarian principles continue to plague us. The atrocities that human beings are capable of inflicting on one another defy the noble aspirations that inspired the birth of our Organization. The irony of such a situation cannot be lost on anyone. Even less can the tragedy of such a predicament be ignored.

Vicious armed conflicts, such as those we have been witnessing in parts of Africa and in the Balkans, not to mention the atrocities recently perpetrated in East Timor,

continue to destroy an untold number of lives, disrupting entire societies, traumatizing tens of thousands of men, women and children and diverting precious resources away from development.

Mr. Ingolfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The international community cannot afford to be complacent about the humanitarian crises that we are witnessing today. It is incumbent on each of us to rise to the challenge of securing a world free from deprivation, fear and oppression. Strengthening the United Nations to become better equipped to address contemporary needs and to meet the challenges of the future thus becomes more urgent. The role of the United Nations in the promotion of preventive diplomacy must increasingly assume particular importance if, collectively, we are to defuse and resolve potentially destructive situations.

Peace and security are intimately intertwined with development and prosperity. Too often, lack of development precipitates conflict. Promoting development helps prevent wars and acts as a means of creating channels of cooperation within, as well as among, nations. This was the essential message emanating from the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development. It was a commitment to consolidate the partnership of nations, a commitment restated and underscored during the review conferences held within the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

Democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law are essential foundations for the attainment of peace and development and for upholding the dignity of the human person. Where these are absent, our efforts to implement post-conflict peace-building, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes in war-torn areas must be intensified. The importance of cementing ceasefire agreements with stable political and economic institutions, while simultaneously creating partnerships between Governments and civil society, cannot be underestimated.

One of the main thrusts of the work of the United Nations has been aimed at the equitable and long-lasting reform of the Security Council, especially given the expanded membership of the Organization. It is in the interest of all to find a solution to the Council's reform that will ensure its smooth functioning, transparency and enhanced relevance.

While the root causes of conflicts are complex, the illegal proliferation and trafficking of weapons clearly has a destabilizing effect on society and only serves to prolong conflicts. Increased global efforts are warranted to monitor and control the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons. The emerging global consensus on the issue is encouraging. Malta looks forward to the eventual convening of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects. Addressing this disruptive phenomenon becomes more urgent when it is compounded by its complex linkages with other equally destabilizing activities, such as international crime, drug trafficking and terrorism.

Responsibility for the plight of peoples cannot be shirked by national Governments. Accountability by individuals for their actions must be enforced. The international community's outrage at shocking, massive violations of human rights has found expression in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. The adoption of the Statute last year in Rome constituted an important milestone. It is Malta's hope that it is only a matter of time before the Court begins to function.

Heinous crimes against humanity are an affront to the intrinsic values of civilization. They cannot be tolerated. Likewise, the shameless disregard for human rights that have been enshrined in various international instruments cannot go unheeded. Effective protection of those rights should not be allowed to fall victim to excuses of national sovereignty. This is even more compelling given that only last year we commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The international community has made great headway in the way it deals with the world's resources to safeguard the heritage of future generations. Since it joined the Organization 35 years ago, Malta has played an active role in this field. It would be remiss of me today not to pay tribute to Professor Arvid Pardo, Malta's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations, who sadly passed away recently. His diplomatic skills and judicious acumen, as well as his vision, were instrumental in developing the concept of the common heritage of mankind. This concept, so ably launched by Professor Pardo on behalf of the Malta Government, was the key to the process that eventually led to the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In a similar vein, during the last session, my delegation was active in promoting the idea of a better

and more substantive discussion on oceans through improved coordination among the various organs dealing with the subject. In this regard, it is our hope that a workable solution to this issue will be reached.

Malta's readiness to play an active and positive role in the furtherance of international peace and cooperation has led to the reactivation of our application for membership in the European Union. In September of last year, following elections and a change in Government, Malta reactivated its application, which had been frozen for the previous two years. The application had been submitted in 1990, and by the time it was suspended in 1996, Malta was widely considered as a prime candidate for early membership of the European Union. The 1998 reactivation was therefore generally seen, both within and outside Malta, as a resumption of unfinished business, rather than as a new beginning.

The contractual basis of our present relationship with the Union remains the Association Agreement signed in 1970, as subsequently amplified and amended. Until it is superseded by membership, we expect this Agreement to remain in force and to continue to be complemented by additional measures in both traditional and new areas of cooperation, including the areas of justice and home affairs.

We see our objective to join the European Union as the most appropriate response to Malta's historical and cultural heritage, as well as to the economic, social and security requirements of our national development. The accession negotiations that we hope to be conducting in the near future will be guided by this perception. The outcome of these negotiations will then be submitted to the judgement of the Maltese people in a referendum.

Since independence in 1964, Malta has been steadfastly committed to the critical role that multilateral cooperation, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter, is increasingly playing in the endeavour towards progress, justice and stability within and among nations.

Over the years, notwithstanding constraints imposed by its size and resources, Malta has engaged itself in many United Nations-sponsored initiatives related to the promotion of human rights, economic and social development, disarmament, the peaceful settlement of disputes and safeguarding the environment. As members of the European Union, we expect to find increased opportunities, as well as to benefit from an increased capacity to pursue these and related objectives at both the global and regional level.

This certainty springs from our conviction that the European Union is at the forefront of endeavours to strengthen international understanding and cooperation. Its policies towards enlargement and regional cooperation, the promotion of economic and social development, conflict resolution and peacekeeping provide a constant gauge of its relevance in this regard.

Malta views the enlargement of the European Union not so much as an option but rather as a fulfilment. Each enlargement step constitutes fulfilment for the Union itself, and that contributes to the completion of an historical process that reverses the age-old conflict and the fragmentation of the European continent. It is also a fulfilment for a candidate country like Malta in that membership assures it of a continuing role in the political and economic life of the continent where most of its history and culture were, and continue to be, forged.

The unfolding of events in Europe over the last decade highlights this fundamental dimension of the Union's enlargement process. As they emerged from political suppression and economic stagnation, the Central and Eastern European States immediately defined their national aspirations within the framework of European integration. For its part, the European Union recognized that the objective of membership for all the Central and Eastern European States was a vital ingredient in sustaining stability and progress throughout the continent in the shorter and the longer term. Significantly, in spite of the complexities involved, there is already a marked readiness by the Union to contribute both assistance and funds towards reconstruction in the Balkans while simultaneously pursuing enlargement through Central and Eastern Europe and with the two Mediterranean islands — Malta and Cyprus.

Cooperation with the neighbouring regions and around the world is, for the European Union, an indispensable accompaniment to enlargement. Be it in the traditional transatlantic domain, on the still-evolving Eastern border or on its historical southern, Mediterranean border, the Union provides a constant and credible reassurance of the outward-looking dimension embedded in the European integration process.

Straddling, as it does, both the horizontal and the vertical axes of the Mediterranean, Malta attaches particular importance to the promotion of cooperation in

this area. It is as much for regional and global geostrategic reasons as it is in our own national security interests for the Mediterranean to be considered as a meeting place, rather than as a dividing line between peoples and cultures.

Of particular importance to us is the Euro-Mediterranean partnership launched in 1995 by the European Union in Barcelona. This partnership provides strong support for our belief that membership in the Union will reinforce Malta's traditional role in the promotion of Mediterranean security and cooperation. One of Malta's contributions to the Union will be the added insight into, and the commitment to, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation that Malta will bring with it. At the regional level, as much as at the broader international level, Malta sees its membership in the European Union as an element of further involvement in the process of multilateral cooperation for peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean.

Malta has welcomed, and is wholeheartedly involved in, the Barcelona partnership because of its intrinsic merits in promoting a concrete and effective programme of cooperation in the Mediterranean. In this regard, at their last meeting in Stuttgart, the foreign ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership agreed to reinforce comprehensive stability in the region through the conclusion of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability — an initiative in which Malta has been active from the outset and which it is keen to see take shape.

Despite the many challenges faced by the Mediterranean, it is our firm view that lasting solutions may be found. We sincerely believe that an early settlement of the Cyprus question along the lines of the relevant Security Council resolutions can be achieved.

Malta has been encouraged by the positive overtures signalled by the major protagonists in the Middle East peace process in recent months. What appeared to be for so long an intractable problem has been slowly but steadily unfolding towards the path of reconciliation and peace. True cooperation within the region demands that the spirit of reconciliation prevail. Recent events — most especially the Wye II Agreement — carried forward by all those working for peace in the region bode well for continued dialogue and cooperation between the parties of the region.

It is in this light that we hail the progress achieved on the question of Lockerbie and the resulting suspension of sanctions on Libya. The satisfaction expressed recently by both the Security Council and the European Union General Affairs Council in respect of positive developments in Libya also augurs well for the inclusion of Libya in the Euro-Mediterranean process as soon as it adopts the Barcelona *acquis*. We welcome this development.

May all these efforts lead to widespread cooperation for the Mediterranean as a whole, bringing peace and prosperity for its people in the years to come.

To many the new millennium is a time of promise and expectation, a period of change and transition. Yet, to many others — indeed too many — it is a time of difficulty and trepidation, of unfulfilled promises. Poised as we are on the brink of a new era, it is vital that the United Nations prevails to safeguard the well-being and prosperity of future generations.

Even our best efforts can be brought to nothing in an instant, by the sheer force of nature. The recent devastating earthquakes that hit the peoples of Turkey, Greece and Taiwan have galvanized the international community. Shocked by the loss of so many lives, the displacement of whole communities and the pain of thousands, the international response to alleviate the suffering was generous and expeditious. It was yet another instance where the expression of solidarity towards the victims of a natural disaster unveiled the human face of the international community.

That same spirit also inspires us when challenged by man-made disasters. It was that same spirit that gave birth to the United Nations.

We acknowledge that the United Nations cannot be the perfect panacea for the ills of the world. Yet it remains the unique platform from which to promote and protect the inherent rights of all peoples to live in peace, freedom and dignity. By focusing on human security in its manifold dimensions — political, economic and social — the United Nations will continue to be a beacon of hope to all nations.

The General Assembly has always shown that it is fully conscious of the need to invest in the future — an investment that also requires the consolidation of a culture of peace. This was the essence of the resolutions that proclaimed the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the next decade as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.

It is our fervent hope that the Millennium Assembly next year will generate the necessary political will and

solidarity to ensure that our efforts on the international scene bear fruit to safeguard the values on which this Organization was founded. We must move the process of introspection and deliberation forward to a process of committed implementation and action. Strong political will and conviction are needed to fulfil our common goals.

We should not aim for short-term remedies, but should rather pool our collective efforts in order to achieve long-lasting solutions to the challenges we face today — the eve of a new era.

This is Malta's pledge for the new millennium. This is what we aim to ensure — that our efforts, both at the national and international level will be achieved.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.

United Nations A/54/PV.15

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

15th plenary meeting
Saturday, 25 September 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Address by Mr. Petar Stoyanov, President of the Republic of Bulgaria

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Mr. Petar Stoyanov, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, His Excellency Mr. Petar Stoyanov, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Stoyanov: May I first congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to this responsible position. I am sure that your vast knowledge and experience are a guarantee of the success of this session.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express my most sincere congratulations also to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his contribution to strengthening the role of the United Nations in line with the challenges of the modern world.

I am going to spare the Assembly the review of this year's international developments that it probably anticipated, because I come from a region that has generated enough bad news and is still the focus of world attention.

Some of the developments in our region were not the result of human will. The earthquakes in Turkey and Greece, which claimed tens of thousands of victims, shook the world. Regrettably, man-made disasters have taken a high toll on our region. The war in Kosovo, the fourth in a row in the former Yugoslavia, has left in its wake a comparable trail of tragedies.

Now that the war is over, there are two things we must do: as soon as possible, repair the damage and alleviate the trauma it has inflicted, and build an infrastructure of security and prosperity that precludes any future repetition of such tragic events.

The international community has in the past set itself similar ambitious tasks. This time, I hope, the experience it has gained has reached the critical mass needed for the achievement of lasting peace settlements in conflict areas.

The consequences of the Kosovo crisis have spilled over the borders of the region. That is why I find it worthwhile to share with the Assembly some conclusions about what was, hopefully, the last war in the Balkans.

With the adoption of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), the world community has endorsed the political end of the system established by the cold war. That resolution reflected the new international status quo and the understanding that has grown during the past 10 years of the importance of individual security.

99-85908 (E)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Today, the rights and dignity of the human individual, civil freedoms and the international rule of law override even the sovereignty of States. This calls for a new responsibility on the part of the international community for their protection. The resolution also showed the commitment of Security Council members to international stability.

Paradoxical as it may sound, the Kosovo crisis has served as a catalyst of post-bipolar relations and of a new type of political dialogue among States. Significantly, for the first time since the Second World War, four permanent Security Council members are participating in one force — KFOR. Furthermore, they have been involved in peacekeeping operations — something that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago.

The Kosovo crisis has also highlighted the need for change within the United Nations system itself. For example, the world Organization is in serious need of a mechanism for compensating neighbouring States for damage caused by international intervention or sanctions. I raise this issue not only because of the losses sustained by my country during the past eight years from the embargo against Iraq and because of the military conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, but also because this will increase the efficiency and boost the image of the United Nations. It will certainly improve the credibility of United Nations-led operations and provide better motivation for individual countries to participate.

On the other hand, the crisis in Kosovo promoted a new type of relations among international organizations in respect of the protection of human rights. As a result of the crisis, a new kind of interface has been born between the United Nations and the regional organizations in Europe, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union and regional initiatives such as the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. This has strengthened the role of the United Nations on that continent.

Today, the Balkan people expect the international community to show the same commitment to the future of the region as it did during the crisis. Threats to peace and security should cease to be the only international mobilizing factor, and we must act towards this end.

I am convinced that the developments in the former Yugoslavia have not been due to some peculiar Balkan mentality or to any historic predestination. Half a century ago, Western Europe was embroiled in wars that were no less bloody. The difference is that after the Second World War the nations of Western Europe were rescued at the same time from fascism and communism. This helped them attain a democratic and economic homogeneity that, in turn, enabled victors and vanquished alike to set aside their differences and build their present prosperity while respecting human rights and protecting their national identity.

Unfortunately, a different lot fell to the countries of South-Eastern Europe after the Second World War. States like Greece and Turkey, both NATO members, preserved and built up their potential for liberal-democratic development and a free market, and the rest of the States in the region were forced to become a part of the Soviet communist system.

Today, 10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Balkans still lack democratic homogeneity. This has been a source of tensions, which, translated into ethnic hatred, are the favoured tool of any totalitarian regime attempting to cling to power. But I am sure it is wrong to apply a common denominator to the whole region. Today Bulgaria, as well as most of the Balkan States, is a country with a working democracy, a free market economy and the rule of law.

An earlier democratic homogenization of South-Eastern Europe can be achieved only if the vision for our countries' integration with the rest of the European States is shared by both the Balkan nations and the people of Western Europe. Efforts and perseverance to this end are the safest guarantee for converting the whole of Europe into a continent of peace, stability and prosperity.

This common European vision fully applies to the future Yugoslavia. There is hardly any country that has a higher stake in Yugoslavia's earliest possible integration in the family of democratic Balkan States than Bulgaria. I cannot but share here the concern of the world community at the continuing ethnic tensions in Kosovo, which distance us from the desired state of peace and ethnic tolerance. Six months ago I firmly supported NATO's operation, designed to end ethnic violence against the Albanian population in Kosovo. Today, just as firmly, I oppose ethnic violence against the Serb population in that province.

The Balkans have paid a high price for peace in Kosovo. Today the region needs direct assistance for its reconstruction. The priority beneficiaries should clearly

be the hardest-hit countries and areas. Nonetheless, rather than discussing figures and reparations, I believe it would be more productive for both the Balkans and the world to adopt a clear vision for the future of South-Eastern Europe. This future has no alternative but the transformation of the Balkans into an integral part of a united Europe of the next century.

The General Assembly is the right forum to discuss the issue of how this can be done. The path leads through the direct rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Balkans — the best form of assistance for our region being "help for self-help". The Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe can provide the necessary framework.

We are convinced that the economic prosperity of the region is a vital condition for achieving political stability. We need infrastructure and strategic investment that generate and guarantee more security than any political dialogue. We need the promotion of trade and a maximum involvement of the economic potential of our countries in the reconstruction effort. This will encourage them to cooperate with each other, while opening up the region and transforming it into a natural, organic part of Europe, rather than isolating it.

The crisis in Kosovo will be long over before its effects, such as the blockage of the Danube to shipping, have been eliminated. The international waterway should not become a new line of conflict; we should help it play its natural role of a link rather than allow it to act as a dividing line across Europe. The issue I am raising at this point concerns both the economic damage that has been caused and the very principles of the European architecture since the end of the crisis in Kosovo.

The location of the Balkans at a crossroads has been a curse for its people in the past; in today's globalized world, it is our greatest blessing. The Balkans should serve as a link between Western Europe and Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. It is one of the most promising regions for the coming century. A case in point is the restoration of the historic silk road, which crosses the whole of Asia and links it to Europe. Restoration will entail huge infrastructure projects and investment which in turn could improve the quality of life of whole nations and regions.

The Balkan nations have already demonstrated a willingness to adopt a new approach in their relations with one another. The various forms of aid which neighbouring States generously offered each other in response to the recent natural disasters were a positive new sign. Another significant fact is the formation of the multinational peace force for South-Eastern Europe, staffed jointly by countries that were enemies earlier this century, including during the cold war. It is an honour for my country that the first headquarters of that force is based in Bulgaria.

I cannot fail to mention here the success of the trilateral initiatives between Bulgaria, Romania and Greece and between Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey for cooperation in combating organized crime and illegal drugs and arms trafficking.

The Kosovo crisis calls for a contemporary rereading of the chronicles of the Balkan wars by all the Balkan peoples: the modern perspective will reveal to them that those wars have done no country in the region any good. The new task facing the political elite is to translate these lessons of history into a lasting commitment to peace and cooperation. Having paid such a high price in suffering and fear, it would be a pity if we failed to learn from our experience.

In conclusion, I reiterate my country's willingness to cooperate with and contribute actively to the joint efforts of all Member States to streamline the United Nations, an Organization with a key role in maintaining international peace and security and achieving the objectives of sustainable development in the coming century.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Bulgaria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Petar Stoyanov, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Francisco Guillermo Flores Pérez, President of the Republic of El Salvador

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. Francisco Guillermo Flores Pérez, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of El Salvador, His Excellency

Mr. Francisco Guillermo Flores Pérez, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Flores Pérez (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Didier Opertti for his tireless work during the session just closed. I should also like, on behalf of my Government and my compatriots, to thank the Secretary-General for his tireless work to carry forward the principles that unite all the nations represented in this Hall.

I should like to tell the Assembly about the fundamental challenges facing my country, which have to do, in those more specific circumstances, with those more universal issues that are the concern of this Organization of all nations.

In only my fourth month as President of El Salvador, I believe I must say that I recognize what a great honour it is for me to address the Assembly. During the months when I was a presidential candidate, my country was full of confused and contradictory ideas as to its direction and destiny. I therefore felt the need to counter the many opposing viewpoints with the one inescapable argument — the reality of my country — in order to find what direction that should be. That is why I dropped the political debate to delve deeply into the only matter that is of interest to any candidate in El Salvador: reading the relationship between the citizens of El Salvador and their country in order to move forward.

That enabled me to identify with rural people, potters, industrialists and tradespeople in their efforts to build a decent future for themselves and their families. At no time during the conversations that I had in various parts of my country was I asked for privileges or perquisites, and neither did people demand assistance programmes: they all wanted to see their own families' destinies built on a foundation of decent work and their own efforts. That requirement, those aspirations addressed to my Government — and to which my Administration is duty bound — are what bring me to this rostrum to address the Assembly.

It seems to me that in recent decades significant progress has been made by our region and by the world as a whole in developing all the political freedoms. My country in particular has moved rapidly during the past seven years through universal suffrage to democratic institutions and the will of the people expressed in all organs of the State. Just seven years ago, El Salvador was completely divided by a fratricidal war; today it has a fully fledged democracy. And in this effort to move forward, we have been encouraged and stimulated by many of the nations whose representatives are listening to these words here today.

However, I must say that the commitment of nations to political freedom finds no corresponding stimulus to or development of economic freedoms: developed countries respond to our efforts to bring our products to the world market with protectionism, trade barriers and quotas. By contrast, our nations are completely open; we have complete economic freedom; we welcome free trade with all nations.

What is the cause of this discontinuity between political freedoms and economic freedoms? How can we promote political freedom and democracy when the world is being closed to economic freedom? Neither I nor my compatriots are asking the world for assistance because of poverty: we are trying to build honourable nations forged by our own work. That is the aspiration of my compatriots, of El Salvador, and of all nations that can hold up their heads in dignity. It is absurd for us to be called upon to demonstrate openness when the developed countries respond with protectionism.

That is why it is important that I highlight these essential challenges. We must choose the path of freedom, but not freedom limited to certain areas. It must be freedom in all its fullness. If political freedom is not matched by economic freedom, how can we justify the efforts of those of us who are trying to change our countries institutionally in order to make them freer? Some in our region are waxing nostalgic about State interventionism and other forms of authoritarianism, as a way of solving our problems.

Future generations will not judge us only by our deeds; they will judge us too by what we fail to do. If we lack the courage to speak or to act, they will demand to know why, on the threshold of the new millennium, we did not want genuinely to open the world to freedom.

Let me acknowledge United Nations assistance and intervention in my country. The efforts of Salvadorans to meet our aspirations to lasting peace would not have met with success without the proper forum through which to bring conciliation among Salvadorans: the United Nations. We must therefore express our gratitude to the Organization, a house of concord among nations, and to its Member States, for their involvement in the achievement of our Peace Agreement. El Salvador has

only one way of expressing that gratitude: while understanding that historical experiences vary, we offer the world our humble experience so that it may be studied by any country that chooses to resolve its conflicts by taking the path of concord.

Following the armed conflict, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans were forced to leave their homes and communities in order to feed their families. Many of my compatriots have been received in nations represented in this Hall. Let me address the nations in which Salvadorans are living, sometimes in difficult circumstances: I ask for understanding for my compatriots; they are in your countries solely because they have to earn a living for their families. They must not be blamed for social tensions that predate their arrival. I call for respect for those Salvadorans. Citizens of the world do not lose their dignity or their rights when they become emigrants. And I wish to send this message to my compatriots scattered across the globe because of the armed struggle: in El Salvador there will always be room for them to thrive. Our common destiny is linked to our hopes and to a hopeful future: that we should be together. I am here not only to represent you but to defend your rights.

In the name of the freedom I have so often evoked, let me speak of a matter that has been a concern of the General Assembly: that of the Republic of China on Taiwan. We believe that when a people, expressing its sovereign will through democratic elections, elects officials, chooses a common destiny and builds a vision of its relations with the rest of the world, it is has the absolute right to participate on an equal footing with the rest of us in this forum. For nearly 50 years, we Salvadorans have maintained relations of all kinds with the Republic of China on Taiwan. It is our firm hope that that friendly people will be able to have a voice in this forum.

We also express our concern that so many years have gone by, and that the matter of setting up operational machinery to promote peace among nations has so often come before the Security Council without any resolution. It is a paradox that, as we speak of concord for the next millennium, we have been unable to reach agreement on this matter. This weakens all; it weakens the United Nations. It is a betrayal of the beliefs of all the nations that want the Organization to participate actively in promoting peace.

I stand in solidarity with nations that have been the victims of natural disasters. We in Central America owe a debt of gratitude to all who helped us when the recent hurricane devastated our Republics — non-governmental organizations, Governments, the United Nations and friendly nations. That debt of gratitude can be converted to solidarity only if we say that we in turn want to do our utmost to help other nations that have been the victims of natural disasters, such as Turkey and the Republic of China on Taiwan, not to mention other, no less painful difficulties such as the conflict that is of such grave concern to our Colombian brethren.

In solidarity between the peoples of Latin America and in solidarity between our two countries — for we too have experienced such a conflict — we offer our brothers in Colombia any kind of assistance or experience they ask for to deal successfully with this problem so like the one that tore apart the lives of the people of El Salvador.

In this Hall that is the forum for the comity of nations, it is incumbent upon us to give substance to the rhetoric of our words. For this reason, since you have done me the honour of patiently listening to me, I would like to say to you that we, just as you, in our efforts for our common future, foresee that the entire world will live in peace, justice and liberty in the years to come.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the President of the Republic of El Salvador for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Francisco Guillermo Flores Pérez, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Rinchinnyamyn Amarjargal, Prime Minister of Mongolia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Mongolia.

Mr. Rinchinnyamyn Amarjargal, Prime Minister of Mongolia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of Mongolia, Mr. Rinchinnyamyn Amarjargal, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Amarjargal (Mongolia): The present session provides Member States with an opportunity to hold a serious and substantive review of world affairs and the role of the United Nations, with particular focus on the forthcoming twenty-first century. In this respect, I have no doubt that the deliberations here will be useful in preparing for the millennium summit and the Millennium Assembly next year, to which events the Mongolian Government attaches great importance.

The United Nations is a truly universal organization comprising large and small, developed and developing countries. This year its membership reached 188 with the admission of three new members: I take this opportunity to convey the warm congratulations of the Mongolian people to the peoples of Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga on this auspicious occasion.

It is gratifying to note that our Organization is not only enlarging its ranks but is also making tangible efforts to restructure its activities in order to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. This is a movement in the right direction. Further promotion of reforms is in the interests of the entire international community, especially the small and medium-sized States. Mongolia consistently supports United Nations reforms aimed at further strengthening the Organization's role in ensuring international peace and security and promoting disarmament, development, social progress and the peaceful settlement of conflicts in various parts of the world.

Increasing globalization and interdependence make it imperative that the international community should redouble its cooperative efforts to meet existing and future challenges and ensure a more secure environment for all nations. Globalization and interdependence also demonstrate the growing importance of multilateralism in world affairs and thus the need to further strengthen and invigorate the United Nations and other international institutions. As a result of its reforms, the United Nations should become more viable and effective, addressing the world's problems equitably.

The 1999 report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/54/1) gives, in our view, a clear and analytical review of United Nations activities, its achievements and setbacks, and the challenges that lie ahead; it contains specific proposals on further measures to improve the Organization's performance the better to serve the interests of its Member States. The Mongolian Government is supportive of the idea advanced by the Secretary-General in paragraph 61 of his report concerning the need to shift from a culture of reaction, to a culture of prevention. It is in this spirit that Mongolia will next week sign a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations on standby agreements whereby it would pledge to participate in future United Nations operations by contributing staff officers, military observers and medical officers.

Mongolia is consistently pursuing its all-embracing democratic reforms and its transition to a market economy. Neither is easy. However, the Government and the people of Mongolia are strongly committed to the choice they made 10 years ago. From this rostrum, I would like to reaffirm that the democratic process in Mongolia is irreversible and that Mongolia's foreign policy will remain constant. My Government greatly appreciates the support and assistance given Mongolia by the international community of donor countries and international organizations. That support and assistance continue to be an important factor in our reform and development efforts.

The major thrust of Mongolia's development strategy is to accelerate economic growth by further advancing macroeconomic stabilization and development of a private-sector-led economy. Mongolia is giving high priority to creating an economic system that is flexible, open, allows a free flow of foreign capital, ensures a competitive environment and is underpinned by stable government policies and a reinvigorated, modern financial sector that encourages economic growth. In pursuing this policy, my Government pays particular attention to the social dimensions of economic reforms, namely poverty alleviation, unemployment reduction and protection for the vulnerable strata of the country's population.

Mongolia's foreign policy activities aim to create a favourable external environment for implementing this development strategy. At the same time, my country is striving to make its contribution to strengthening international peace and stability generally as well as promoting dialogue and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. Active participation in regional affairs — integration into regional processes coupled with consolidation of our bilateral ties with the countries of the region — is one of Mongolia's foreign policy priorities. I am pleased to say that this year has been especially fruitful in this respect.

International developments highlight once again the fragility of peace and stability in certain areas of the

world and the need for concerted actions and for the increased cooperation of States to prevent the outbreak of new conflicts, seek viable solutions to the existing disputes and promote further mutual understanding and trust among nations.

While noting some positive developments in international relations, Mongolia is seriously concerned with the lingering zones of tension, ethnic strife and armed conflict in Africa, Asia and Europe. It calls on the parties involved to display restraint and seek peaceful solutions through political dialogue and negotiations. In this context Mongolia welcomes the resumption of the peace process in the Middle East, which in our view should lead to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Mongolia also duly appreciates the steps taken by the Security Council to address the emergency situation in East Timor and welcomes the cooperative approach of the Government of Indonesia regarding the establishment of a multinational force to halt and reverse the escalation of the human catastrophe there. The people of East Timor have overwhelmingly expressed themselves in favour of independence.

My delegation stresses the importance of continuing the intra-Korean dialogue and the four-party talks for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in the Asia-Pacific region in general.

We are concerned about the tension in South Asia and add our voice to that of the international community, which is calling on India and Pakistan to proceed to political dialogue and search for a peaceful solution to their dispute.

Peace and stability are essential prerequisites for promoting economic development and social progress. That is why arms control and disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, remain at the top of the global agenda. Efforts to achieve further substantive progress in arms control and disarmament should be intensified. Agreements should be honoured and implemented. Nuclear tests, missile technology developments, concerns over the anti-ballistic missile treaty — all point to the urgent need for invigorating our activities in this field. International arms control efforts need to be comprehensive and include all aspects of arms and military technology. Strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime stands out as one of the top priorities, due not only to the devastating nature of nuclear weapons and the enormous existing arsenal of them, but also to the negative effect they have on the disarmament process in general.

Mongolia fully supports adopting multilateral norms restraining the development and possession of medium-range missiles and preventing their proliferation. We believe that progress on the START track will be helpful in advancing disarmament negotiations in all areas. Nuclear disarmament also calls for speedy agreement on banning fissile materials for nuclear-weapons purposes. Mongolia continues to attach great importance to establishing effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

My delegation welcomes the outcome of the 1999 sessions of the Disarmament Commission and of the Preparatory Committee for the year 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Mongolia attaches great importance to the role of the Review Conference in strengthening the international regime of nuclear non-proliferation. It also favours the earliest possible convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

Three years have elapsed since the adoption by the General Assembly of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was a landmark event in the field of nuclear disarmament. Regrettably, this important international instrument has not yet come into force. Mongolia wishes to reiterate its call on those States that have not done so to sign and ratify the Treaty as soon as possible and thus contribute to the expeditious realization of its noble objectives. We sincerely hope that the forthcoming conference of the States that have ratified this Treaty will be conducive to taking the necessary measures to this end.

It is our belief that all States, irrespective of their size and weight, can facilitate the attaining of the overall goal of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. That is why we believe that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in different parts of the world should be encouraged and supported. For its part, Mongolia is making efforts in this respect by declaring its territory a nuclear-weapon-free zone and taking the subsequent steps necessary to institutionalize its nuclear-weapon-free status.

Last year the General Assembly adopted by consensus resolution 53/77 D on Mongolia's international

security and nuclear-weapon-free status. This was a significant and encouraging event for Mongolia, testifying to the existence of broad international support for our objectives and efforts. The adoption of the resolution constitutes an important contribution not only to Mongolia's security, but also — given Mongolia's strategic location — to regional security. Implementation of the main provisions of the resolution — in cooperation with other Member countries, including the five nuclear-weapon States, and the United Nations — is one of the major objectives of our foreign policy. The Mongolian Government has recently circulated a memorandum on this issue as an official United Nations document, in which it pointed out, *inter alia*, that the Mongolian parliament is considering the adoption of legislation defining its nuclear-weapon-free status.

Recently Mongolia hosted a United Nations regional disarmament meeting, one of the agenda items of which was the issue of Mongolia's international security and nuclear-weapon-free status. The meeting proved to be useful in clarifying the pressing security issues, and it provided an opportunity for the first in-depth analysis and discussion of Mongolia's nuclear-weapon-free status in the light of its external security. We believe that identifying and defining Mongolia's nuclear-weapon-free status will contribute to enhancing predictability, stability and confidence in north-east Asia.

My Government fully shares the aspirations to ban anti-personnel landmines and welcomes the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention. The illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons is a matter of growing concern for the international community. Therefore Mongolia supports the convening of an international conference to consider this issue in 2001.

Considering that only comprehensive arms-control and disarmament measures will be effective in ensuring international security, we, like many others, stand for prompt agreement on a new comprehensive and non-selective agenda for disarmament that will address the relevant issues in a balanced manner, taking into account, among other things, the need to prevent the development and use of new weapons as well as to demilitarize the global economy by reducing military budgets and shifting resources towards human-security programmes.

Development issues continue to be the focus of attention of national Governments and international organizations and undoubtedly will be a major challenge in the forthcoming century. Globalization affects all States, though differently and unevenly. Many developing countries, particularly the least developed, not only fail to enjoy the benefits of globalization, but are being further marginalized. Therefore, the adverse effects of globalization should be addressed seriously and the United Nations should be more actively involved in the issue.

The Asian economic and financial crisis has had significant socio-economic and security implications for the countries of the region. Though the situation is somehow stabilizing and the countries directly hit by the crisis are showing some signs of recovery, the international community should draw the necessary lessons from this crisis and consider ways and means of preventing such crises in the future.

While appreciating the work done by the United Nations in the social and economic fields, my delegation would like to underline the importance of taking further effective measures to ensure the best utilization of the existing capacities and comparative advantages of the Organization. Therefore, it seems appropriate to stress the necessity of closer interaction and cooperation between the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other relevant international organizations.

The financing of development represents a very sensitive and pressing issue that requires special attention on the part of the international community. Mongolia believes that the high-level intergovernmental meeting on financing for development to be held in 2001 will be timely in exploring the various options of promoting financial stability and development. In this respect, relieving the debt burden of the highly indebted developing countries would be a form of contribution to their development efforts. We also attach great importance to the South-South summit and the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD X), to be held next year.

Mongolia supports the universality of the World Trade Organization. The new round of multilateral trade negotiations should facilitate the integration of the developing countries into the world economy. The expansion of international cooperation for development should place particular emphasis on assisting the most vulnerable countries, which find themselves more and more marginalized and insecure. Unfavourable geographical location serves as a major impediment to the development efforts of landlocked developing countries.

The problems of this group of States demand the increased attention and support of the international community. The steps that could ease the hardships of these countries were recently examined in New York at the fourth Meeting of Governmental Experts from Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Representatives of Donor Countries and Financial and Development Institutions. Its outcome should be endorsed by the General Assembly.

In North-East Asia, efforts are under way to conclude a subregional agreement on transit transportation as a follow-up to the decisions of the 1997 Ulan Bator meeting on transit transportation. The conclusion of this agreement will create a legal framework for facilitating transit trade not only within the subregion, but well beyond it.

Sustainable development, environmental degradation, illicit drug trafficking, HIV/AIDS, organized crime and other transboundary problems should be adequately addressed at the national, regional and global levels. The "+5" review special sessions of the General Assembly held or scheduled to be held as follow-ups to the United Nations summit conferences are important not only for assessing the work done, but also for giving a fresh impetus to the implementation of their objectives at all levels.

At the national level, Mongolia, in close partnership with the United Nations organizations and the non-governmental organizations, successfully organized the One-World Conference Series in 1998-1999. The aim of the six national conferences was to raise awareness at the grass-roots level of the commitments made at the global conferences and to ensure their integrated and coordinated follow-up.

Mongolia is committed to the promotion and protection of human rights and supports the strengthening of the existing international instruments in this field. We believe that the approval at this session of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would mark an important contribution to the protection and promotion of human rights and the dignity of women the world over.

Continued gross violations of human rights make it imperative to speed up the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Mongolia highly appreciates and fully supports the efforts of the international community in this respect. Likewise, Mongolia joins other States in condemning terrorist acts that are taking the lives of an increasing number of innocent people in various parts of the world and supports every effort of Member States and of the international community as a whole to fight all forms of terrorism and strengthen the relevant international instruments.

This year, the United Nations Decade of International Law is drawing to a close. The decade has been instrumental in drawing the international community's attention to the need for the codification and progressive development of international law. Today, international law is regulating many aspects of international relations. I agree with the Secretary-General that one of the greatest accomplishments of the twentieth century is the creation of an international code of human rights, to which the outgoing Decade has duly contributed. One of the practical results of the Decade was the adoption last year, on Mongolia's initiative, by the General Assembly of a set of principles and guidelines for international negotiations that could be useful in conducting negotiations to manage international relations, to peacefully settle disputes and to create new international norms of conduct for States.

Fully conscious of the challenges that lie ahead, mankind still looks forward to the twenty-first century with great expectations and hope. I believe it is the earnest hope and keen desire of all the peoples of the world that the next century be far better in all respects, more progressive and prosperous, than the outgoing one. Where there is a will, there will surely be a way to achieve it. It is up to Member States to make the dream a reality. As the Secretary-General has underlined in his report, we can do it.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Mongolia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rinchinnyamyn Amarjargal, Prime Minister of Mongolia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Carlos Veiga, Prime Minister of Cape Verde

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Cape Verde.

Mr. Carlos Veiga, Prime Minister of Cape Verde, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of Cape Verde, Mr. Veiga, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Veiga (Cape Verde)(*spoke in Portuguese; French text furnished by the delegation*): Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to convey to you and your country, Namibia, my heartfelt congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly for this session. We are fully confident that your ability, well-known experience and personal talent will crown our work with success, to which the delegation of Cape Verde will contribute its greatest efforts.

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for the professionalism and devotion with which he conducted the work of the Assembly at its fifty-third session. We would also like to say that, at a time when the international community must confront complex challenges, it is a great privilege for the United Nations to be able to rely on the creativity, dynamism and determination that the Secretary-General brings to his lofty office.

We are pleased to welcome the Republics of Kiribati and Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga as new members in our Organization.

The annual session of the General Assembly which opened a few days ago will lead us into the next millennium; during the session, preparations will be made for various important events planned for the year 2000, including the special sessions of the General Assembly on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly will also prepare for a major event, the millennium summit. Therefore, this will be a time when we will need to demonstrate not only our most lucid thinking, but also and perhaps primarily a firm will to act. The core of our discussions will be the great challenges that humanity faces today and will face in the foreseeable future, and we will need to identify what must be done to meet them successfully. In that regard, clarification of the role which the United Nations must play and specific ways for it to attain this goal must be a priority of the summit agenda.

We are at the end of a decade marked by a new phase in international affairs, a decade, however, that was one of unmet expectations when we think back to how high they were at its beginning. The experience of the past few years has been one of continuous increase in the complexity and frequency of emerging situations leading to a veritable overhaul of concepts and perceptions. But we are not sure that we are any closer to the major solutions we lack. It might even be said that we have embarked on a process that has its own logic and momentum and in which the attainment of common aspirations does not always seem to be the driving force. Yet today, and not only today, we have at our disposal sufficient intellectual and material resources to build a successful future. It is therefore disquieting to have to acknowledge that, despite all this potential, humankind is still incapable of controlling its own destiny. Acquiring this ability is an imperative, therefore, and must be the fundamental goal of our debates at the dawn of the new millennium.

Given that the destiny of humankind is a collective challenge, control over it must be sought collectively for it to be meaningful. The effective implementation of the concept of "international community", which has been the basis of our political philosophy for a long time now, can no longer be avoided or postponed as it has been so far.

When the millennium summit meets a year from now, the leaders of the world must be prepared to start rebuilding an international community and usher in a new era in which sustainable human development will become a real right for all peoples; in which international justice will be more effective; and in which the United Nations Charter will no longer be applied in a manner that bends with the wind.

Democracy as a means of ordering and managing societies has seen important progress during this decade. In its most visible aspects, such as the selection of leaders through pluralistic, more transparent processes, it is based on an understanding that governance by elected officials can and should bring peace, prosperity and justice to a society and that elected leaders are politically accountable for the results obtained.

As we all know, these assumptions are not absolute and are becoming even less so. When looking at governments individually, it is apparent that command and control of important factors which determine the well-being of citizens are sorely lacking. Meeting the necessary conditions for each State to succeed depends to a large extent on multilateral concertation and cooperation. This dialogue between States, however, will

not be enough to resolve all the points at issue, which are increasingly in the hands of third parties.

Today, therefore, there is a growing gap between social responsibility — which remains limited to the public and the political domains — and the availability of the wherewithal and will to act on which this responsibility is based. However the situation evolves, adjustment must be ensured through revitalization of this same concept of "international community" to which I referred. Once again, this concept proves to be the cornerstone of the quest for a harmonious and prosperous destiny for humankind.

The progress to which we aspire will always coexist with differences and even inequality. Of that we are well aware. But the shocking magnitude of poverty today must provoke a gut feeling of rejection that makes it imperative for this situation to be remedied at any cost. The palliative measures that we seek to introduce and maintain should not lull us and cannot take the place of definitive solutions. It is imperative that poverty should no longer be seen as an acceptable or inevitable by-product of the economic and social process: rather, we should come to see it as a serious breakdown in it that must be attacked and corrected. Even in societies considered to be well off, poverty victimizes certain segments of the population that lack even the minimum material conditions to live in dignity. The least-developed countries are even less able to roll back poverty in any meaningful way.

Speaking of poverty necessarily prompts a discussion of the situation in Africa, where the greatest number of least-developed countries are found. We have said before — and this does not detract from Africa's own, inherent responsibility — that the way Africa has been left out of development is also a failure of the international system. Africa's development difficulties have often been aggravated by conflicts, but we cannot just wait for peace to happen there or be discouraged by the current situation.

Finally, while conflicts in Africa have many causes, economic underdevelopment has been recognized as an important factor. It is therefore regrettable to witness the reduction in development assistance in Africa; this has a direct negative impact on the living conditions of its peoples, including a decline in health standards, the dooming to failure of adequate education prospects and a slowdown in provision of the necessary African infrastructure. The impact has been worsened by the decrease in official development assistance to small island developing States, some of which — in apparent contradiction to their particular structural constraints — are showing relatively acceptable human development indicators and higher gross national product per head indicators than those found at the bottom of the world scale. That, together with the good performance of these countries, has often been used to justify a precipitous and disastrous reduction in official development assistance.

We would not claim that our countries should be spared from changing and improving in order to mobilize and rechannel resources towards these areas and many others that I have mentioned. I would, however, stress that this reduction in assistance, due to a certain "fatigue" that sometimes takes on the appearance of a form of punishment, cannot solve anything. Rather, development assistance policy should continue to seek means of combating and eliminating wasteful activities and guarantee an effective channelling of resources towards activities that are necessary to development.

Of course, we agree that official development assistance is not the key to prosperity. But, added to vigorous strides with regard to debt to ease the current financial stranglehold, it facilitates the creation of favourable human and material conditions for direct investment, competitiveness, fruitful trade and Africa's lasting integration into the world economy.

This reference to Africa's external debt is not mere rhetoric. While welcoming recent steps taken and announced by countries and groups of creditors that have a particular solidarity with Africa, I must say that this question has for too long been dealt with too ungenerously, too late and too slowly. Today's steps, limited in content and in the range of countries concerned, and with overly restrictive eligibility conditions, would have had much more impact if they had been taken when they were so urgently demanded a long time ago. Moreover, they would have facilitated the continuation and necessary deepening of the economic and political reforms under way on the African continent, and would have stimulated increased African regional cooperation.

After 24 years of illegal occupation and extreme suffering inflicted on the people of East Timor, the process of self-determination appeared to be leading to an honourable conclusion for all interested parties. But with great dismay and indignation we witnessed violent events in the Territory in recent weeks. These vile acts, perpetrated by people determined to reverse the choice of independence that the Timorese clearly expressed at the ballot box, could and should have been prevented, and

they should receive the total rejection and most vigorous, effective condemnation of the international community.

Since the illegal occupation and annexation of East Timor by Indonesia, Cape Verde always strongly defended the cause of the Timorese people and always fought for the retention of the problem of East Timor on the Assembly's agenda. We reaffirm our tireless support for East Timor's independence and for the territorial integrity of this fraternal country, and we call upon the United Nations to act with all necessary firmness to promote and guarantee the full implementation of the New York agreements, in particular the provisions of Security Council resolution 1264 (1999).

We therefore welcome the arrival of the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) and strongly support any necessary measures it might take to carry out its mission of restoring order and security; protecting the Timorese people from coercion, intimidation, violence and terrorism; and guaranteeing a peaceful transition towards independence.

However, our pleasure at the effective quick reaction by the international community as a result of the pressure of worldwide public opinion should not allow us to forget the thousands of Timorese suffering great shortages and brutal violations of their most elementary human rights, or the men, women and children persecuted and forcibly deported to West Timor and elsewhere in Indonesia simply because they freely exercised the right of a people to self-determination under the aegis of the United Nations. It follows that the international community has a moral and legal duty to give them immediate, sufficient humanitarian assistance; to promote and guarantee the return of all Timorese refugees and deported persons, with dignity and security; to bring to international justice all those morally and physically responsible for crimes against humanity and gross violations of the most fundamental human rights, committed in East Timor in a planned, systematic way; and to provide substantial, effective support for the reconstruction of a country which has suffered from criminal, premeditated destruction.

In Angola, unfortunately, hostilities have resumed and the prospects for the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol have vanished, despite United Nations intervention, which, it must be acknowledged, has not been successful. The clear inability of the international community to secure strict compliance by all the parties and States concerned with the commitments that they undertook under agreements negotiated under the aegis of the United Nations, including resolutions of its own bodies, has led to the re-emergence of this conflict. That is because it has not prevented UNITA from seriously rearming and impeding the extension of State administration to the whole of Angola's territory.

The magnitude of the long and bloody conflict in Angola should be a source of great concern to the international community, which should continue and intensify its efforts to identify possible ways of restoring peace to Angola, efforts that should be deployed by all the entities that can contribute. Cape Verde will not fail to participate to the extent that its resources allow.

One priority must be to bring together everything needed to deal with the unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe hitting Angola. The need is great and urgent. Everything possible should be done to provide immediate and adequate humanitarian assistance to the people suffering from the scourge of war.

Cape Verde follows with the same fraternal solidarity developments in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, where the Government is making preparations, with the assistance of the United Nations and the international community, to hold free democratic elections.

We look forward to the success of the people of Guinea-Bissau as it enters a new stage in its life, when the whole of society is preparing to rebuild its country and to use all of its resources to improve its living conditions. We call upon the international community to provide ongoing generous support to rebuild the country within this long-term process.

We welcome recent events reflecting the decision of the United Nations to intervene more concretely to maintain peace in Africa, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone — and we hope soon in Eritrea and in Ethiopia.

Today it is clear that our continent is more than ever determined to harmonize its efforts to control and resolve conflicts in the region while hoping for the necessary outside support to strengthen its capacity in this regard. Regional responsibilities cannot, however, take the place of the responsibilities of the United Nations, which must fully play the role given it by the Charter.

As well as efforts to contain and resolve conflicts, there must be — as has often been stated, but all too often not put into practice — efforts to prevent them.

They are often rooted in long-standing situations of injustice, exclusion, inequality and the denial of rights. The latter is something that individuals, groups and even whole nations continue to suffer from.

Wherever flouted dignity cannot properly voice its legitimate demands, wherever those demands do not receive a reasonable response, conflict is brewing. It is true that some established situations do not lend themselves to rapid or dramatic change. In those cases sincere dialogue and healthy compromise may open the way to a progress that intolerance and lack of willingness can never bring about.

While the conflicts prevailing today are basically internal, it would be irresponsible for us to ignore the external factors that feed them. From classic territorial disputes to more diffuse questions with an impact on the acquisition of advantages in economic competition, we see on the international scene various factors that thwart the desired security and balance. We must replace the narrow criterion of national self-interest, or its equivalents, as the paradigm of international affairs with multilateral participative arrangements based on equity.

Among the items on the agenda that this session inherited from the previous one, reform of the Security Council is a key element for rebuilding and revitalizing the United Nations. For some years it has been the subject of ongoing negotiations. This entire time, we feel, was needed for the various bases and arguments underpinning existing positions and proposals to be properly understood.

The questions posed are complex, and we cannot deny the relevance of any position. The basic divergence, we think, lies in the priority given by some to the preservation of the Council's effectiveness and by others to the representation of the current body of Member States. We believe that the impasse we are facing is clear and that the consideration we have already given to the matter should enable us to take decisions in the not-too-distant future.

We believe that increasing the Council's effectiveness, while increasing the number of its members, is a challenge within our grasp. In our view, we should not give more weight to the size of the gap, which is quite small, between the various proposals made in this area than to the special nature of the fundamental principles of representative participation.

For example, how can one, by attaching more importance to the question of effectiveness, refuse to give the African countries, which represent almost 30 per cent of the United Nations membership, at least two permanent seats enjoying full powers?

We hope, Mr. President, that under your enlightened guidance we can make a big leap forward in the consideration of this important agenda item during the current session.

Before I conclude, I wish to reiterate what a constant source of inspiration the Charter is to us. I refer in particular to the noble and always relevant words of the preamble, whose implementation will be a constant challenge to us in the course of the century to come.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Cape Verde for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Carlos Veiga, Prime Minister of Cape Verde, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia, His Excellency Mr. Mate Granić.

Mr. Granić (Croatia): Let me first extend sincere congratulations to you, Sir, as the new President of the General Assembly. I am confident that your rich diplomatic experience and the reputation you enjoy will play an important role in leading the Assembly's work.

I would also like to give credit to Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay for the great skill and persistence he showed in presiding over the work of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

May I also welcome the three new Member States of our Organization, Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga. The United Nations is richer for their membership.

We are only one year away from the Millennium Assembly, an event whose symbolism should inspire us to strive harder to achieve all the goals of the Organization. In looking forward to the challenges of the future, our countries also realize that the world continues to hold many dangers. It has been rightly said that globalization has two faces. While accounting for an increasingly complex web of linkages across the full spectrum of human endeavour, it has also led to increased alienation and, in some cases, disparity. Quite clearly, the United Nations is at the forefront of efforts

to address and reconcile these complex processes. The struggle to raise and improve the quality of life of the hundreds of millions who continue to suffer the anguish of poverty, the protection of our precious environment, the strengthening of democracy and the protection of human rights, responding effectively to natural disasters, further progress in disarmament and dealing properly with security crises as they arise all continue to occupy us.

Having mentioned the issue of security, allow me to observe that the situation in South-Eastern Europe has come full circle with the return of the epicentre of the crisis to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Kosovo, where it started more than a decade ago. The military intervention of the international community, supported by all the countries of the region, including Croatia, must now be followed up with an appropriate political response. Just as we joined the international community in condemning violations of human rights, it is clear that energies must now be concentrated on building a lasting and just peace.

With regard to the security issue of Prevlaka, as with other matters resulting from the aggression and territorial pretensions of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, bilateral negotiations have been unsuccessful. The simple reason is that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia does not wish to accept Croatia's internationally recognized borders. Only when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia accepts Prevlaka as a purely security-related issue instead of considering it a territorial dispute, and refrains from abusing this issue in internal Serbian-Montenegrin relations, will a solution be at hand. The opening of border crossings with the Republic of Montenegro has, by allowing for the freedom of movement of people and goods, significantly contributed to regional stability and helped the democratic transformation of Montenegro.

Croatia has proposed the establishment of a bilateral security regime as a follow-up to the present one administered by the United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP). Whether as a result of successful bilateral negotiations with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, of a Security Council resolution or even of unilateral action consistent with the rights and duties of Croatia under international law, the UNMOP mandate should be terminated soon. Further prolongation of the mandate will only serve those who wish to stall negotiations indefinitely, which is contrary to good-neighbourly relations and the interests of stability in the wider region.

The key legal issue arising from the disintegration of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia remains that of succession. As long as this matter is unresolved, the prospects for lasting normalization in the region will be hampered for all the successor States. Responsibility for this state of affairs lies squarely with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which keeps rejecting the conclusions of the United Nations/European Union Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, as well as the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. Only if rooted in this existing body of international law and authority can the question of succession be resolved. Pending a full resolution of this issue, the normal economic processes that might otherwise promote stability and cooperation cannot have a positive effect, either on the region or on bilateral relations.

Over the past year, Croatia has persevered in its determination to enlarge and enrich the content and scope of its special bilateral relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am particularly pleased to be able to inform the Assembly that we have recently resolved one of the hitherto open questions in our relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina: an agreement has been signed settling the issue of our common border.

Croatia will continue both to support the implementation of the Dayton agreements regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina and to maintain its commitment to ensuring the rights of the Croats, as the least numerous of its three constituent peoples.

Following a slow initial response, there has been a proliferation of both national and multinational initiatives throughout the second half of the 1990s aimed at ensuring long-term stability in South-Eastern Europe. The new Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe builds upon the sound foundation provided by the prospect of the inclusion of the States of the region in the Euro-Atlantic integration processes. However, its success will depend upon an individual evaluation of the progress being made by the respective States, an evaluation which should be based upon simple, clear and transparent criteria.

My country has welcomed the Pact as an important development involving all the relevant international actors and seeking a comprehensive solution. In the view of Croatia, the strengths of the Pact — provided that it is implemented to the letter — are, first, its comprehensiveness and, secondly, its vision of integrating the participating States into the Euro-Atlantic structures.

In this way, we hope that it will marshal the hitherto dispersed energies of the international community. Croatia lends its full support to the process related to the Pact and reiterates its determination to continue to take an active role in its implementation.

The joint success of the United Nations and the Croatian Government in peacefully reintegrating the previously occupied part of eastern Croatia early last year has been followed by the gradual return of displaced persons to their homes, not only in that region, but also to other areas of Croatia. It is a complex process involving the return of Croats to their homes in the previously occupied areas, and the return of Croatian Serbs to their homes from other countries and from eastern Croatia to other parts of the country.

While the difficult economic circumstances, particularly in the areas of return, are certainly not helping the process, they are affecting all citizens equally. In spite of these objective circumstances, the national Programme for the Return and Accommodation of Displaced Persons, Refugees and Exiled Persons is being successfully implemented and has resulted in the return of 65,000 Croatian Serbs.

Croatia maintains intensive relations with the International war crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. It has taken numerous steps, from providing documentation and access to alleged crime sites to assisting in the voluntary surrender of indicted persons to the Tribunal. Whenever a legal dispute has arisen, Croatia has sought ways of resolving it through proceedings within the Tribunal Chamber itself. However, while it has lent its full support and cooperation to the Tribunal, Croatia is not fully satisfied with the results to date. Indictments issued so far do not adequately reflect the true nature and scope of the war crimes committed by different sides in the conflict. The unusual delay in bringing persons in custody before the court — in some cases more than two years, despite the initial assurances of speedy trials — has not strengthened the Tribunal's credibility.

No one has been charged for the crimes committed against Bosnian Croats — despite assurances given as long ago as the Dayton negotiations — and no one has been sentenced for crimes committed during the aggression against Croatia, despite ample evidence and 14,000 deaths.

Allow me to repeat what I have said on previous occasions in this forum. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia continues to harbour the notorious war criminal Mile Martic and the perpetrators of the most heinous war crimes committed in Vukovar — Mrksic, Sljivancanin and Radic. Its stance overtly defies the will of the Security Council, the international community and justice in general. It also poses a big obstacle to the reconciliation process.

We have witnessed tremendous advances during the twentieth century. However, many challenges remain, particularly if we are to eradicate poverty, protect our environment, and promote and achieve sustained social development and economic growth.

The recent important deliberations and work of the Economic and Social Council have confirmed that the Council is an important forum for addressing the manifold issues arising from globalization. Croatia believes that implementation of the negotiated outcomes in the broad subject areas of sustainable development is the key to promoting the global agenda of leaving a healthy planet Earth for future generations to enjoy. The system of international conferences, now undergoing their five-year reviews, and the United Nations system as a whole, have a leading role to play in this regard. It is with all these factors in mind that Croatia has chosen the Economic and Social Council as the first principal body to which to present its candidature.

Our hopes and goals for the future notwithstanding, the world is still encumbered with the legacies of the twentieth century. The scourge of war and all that violent conflicts bring with them are still a clear and ever-present concern. The United Nations must be ready to cope with these challenges. This inevitably requires reform of the Organization. There is, of course, a broad consensus about the need for reform, but as always, the devil is in the details. The United Nations needs to have mechanisms at its disposal to address the issues arising from the new international order in a timely and efficient manner. The reforms within the competency of the Secretary-General are moving ahead. The Member States should now grasp the symbolism of the new millennium in order to conclude the reform process.

The reform of the Security Council remains stalled. The primary task of the Council, the maintenance of international peace and security, makes its representation and transparency, and hence its reform, highly important.

Questions related to mine clearance and to the destruction of anti-personnel and other types of mines are a matter of special concern to Croatia. In spite of the fact

that much work is being done to alleviate this problem, hundreds of thousands of mines still lie scattered over 6,000 square kilometres of Croatia's territory. Having ratified the Ottawa Convention last year, Croatia was pleased to host a regional conference on anti-personnel mines in Zagreb in July this year and thus share its experience and expertise directed at ridding the world of these terrible weapons.

The United Nations is best known for its peacekeeping role around the world. Croatia, which has hosted five separate peacekeeping operations on its territory, has in recent weeks taken on the role of a contributor of peacekeepers. As we have announced in the past, through its participation in the United Nations mission in Sierra Leone Croatia will now be able to repay in kind the good deeds previously bestowed on it. The Croatian Government is honoured by this responsibility and is confident that its soldiers will be exemplary members of the United Nations force. Additionally, we welcome the evolutionary developments in the area of peacekeeping, from the use of civilian police and preventive forces to the "White Helmets" proposal.

The promotion and protection of human rights requires constant vigilance and effort by all responsible Governments. The Croatian Government, through its National Committee for Human Rights Education, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and experts from the Council of Europe, is preparing a national programme on human rights education targeting schoolchildren at the primary and secondary levels.

Croatia continues to follow closely the progress being made towards establishing an International Criminal Court. The establishment of an efficient, permanent International Criminal Court will be a milestone in the march towards the universal protection of human rights and the rule of law. Croatia has signed the Statute of the Court and looks forward to other States doing so, too, so that this great achievement of the international community can commence its operation as soon as possible.

The present session of the General Assembly will be vital in preparing for the coming Millennium Assembly. It is important that this Assembly be well prepared so that it is an event of substance rather than of ceremonial character. Croatia hopes that it will be a real crossroads and that it will succeed in providing guidelines for a better and more tolerant world in the coming millennium.

Allow me to conclude by noting that Croatia is looking forward to the work of the fifty-fourth session, hopeful that it will bring further progress in addressing the challenges and grasping the opportunities of our times.

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Manh Cam.

Mr. Nguyen Manh Cam (Viet Nam) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the delegation of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and on my own behalf, I should like to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I am convinced that, thanks to your experience and wisdom, this session will have a successful outcome. I should like also to express my thanks and great appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his important contribution and the effectiveness of his presidency during the fifty-third session.

I should also like to congratulate and warmly welcome the three new States Members of the Organization: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. The Government and the people of Viet Nam are pleased to greet those three Pacific countries and to assure them of our willingness to establish and develop fruitful and close cooperation.

The current session of the General Assembly is of special significance. As a bridge between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it will prepare us for entering a new century and a new millennium. This is therefore an important moment, as it affords us the opportunity to take stock of the advent and evolution and the highs and lows of this greatest international Organization over more than half a century. Such an assessment will help us draw lessons and provide us with the necessary valuable experience from which we can identify what needs to be done so as to allow the United Nations to continue to play its role and exercise its influence in the world today and in the future.

The twentieth century, which is drawing to a close, has been marked by great achievements for humankind at every level of its development, but it also requires us to reflect deeply about problems unforeseen in previous centuries. Two world wars and hundreds of protracted conflicts, civil wars and situations of local tension in various regions of the world have claimed the lives of more than 150 million people and left permanent scars,

both spiritual and physical, on hundreds of millions of others. They have destroyed the creative achievements of many generations, some of which was irreplaceable. That has given human beings a deeper, more burning desire to live in peace, security, freedom and happiness, and to achieve stable and sustainable development for the benefit of humankind and our beautiful planet. The creation of the United Nations more than 50 years ago, with its clearly defined statutes and objectives, contributed to the realization of those aspirations. Indeed, during the twenty-first century humankind has witnessed extraordinary progress in the decolonization process, the collapse of the colonial system and the successful promotion of the sacred right of peoples to national self-determination, resulting in the birth of many independent States and, therefore, in fundamental changes in international relations. The achievements of the United Nations over the past 54 years are due in large part to the contribution of those young, independent countries.

In spite of the important progress made towards the development of nation States during the twentieth century, we must acknowledge that humanity is confronted with many unresolved problems. Over the past few decades of this century, the explosion in science and technology, especially in the field of information technology, has changed the structure of many economies and profoundly affected the cultural and social life of every State. Our world has become a global village, geographic distance is less of a factor than it used to be, and interdependence, interaction and cooperation among States, regions and continents have continued to increase. It is unfortunate, however, that many of these achievements have not been used purely for the benefit humankind, but have been misused or even used abusively against humankind. The arms race, especially the development of nuclear weapons and other new weapons that are more and more sophisticated, dangerous and deadly weapons, is not only draining significant resources but also threatening to destroy people's lives and the environment.

In the past year, the situation in certain regions has faced the international community with the challenge of the politics of diktat practised by a group of countries and regional organizations. The unilateral military attacks against the territorial integrity of sovereign States in the Balkans and the Gulf have set a dangerous precedent in international relations, running counter to the purposes and principles of the United Nations and in violation of the fundamental principles of international law, especially those of respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States. This presented a serious challenge to the role and effectiveness of the United Nations, as well as to its legal foundations.

The first lesson to be learned from those events is that it is not possible for the United Nations to build or guarantee peace and security in the world at large or at the regional level unless international law and the United Nations Charter are fully respected and strictly implemented. Secondly, the United Nations can play the role and exert the influence that is commensurate with its magnitude only if, now as well as in the future, it steadfastly upholds the purposes and principles defined at San Francisco 54 years ago and carries out a thorough and in-depth reform of its organizational structure and operation, in order to imbue the Organization with inner strength.

By so doing, the United Nations will be able to prevent any country or regional organization from using a pretext, or a cause such as human rights, for example, to trample on the independence, sovereignty or territorial integrity of another country or to interfere in its internal affairs. By so doing, the United Nations will be able to preserve its important role and to meet the expectations of Member States with respect to preventing policies of diktat and the use or threat of use of force in international relations. And by so doing, the United Nations will be able to help create and foster the climate of lasting peace and security that is needed for the solid, sustainable development that all Member countries need today and will need in the coming century.

Today, peace and security have a dialectical and consistent link with development. Development has become an important element in the broadly accepted concept of security. This has made every country more globally relevant while making all States less isolated. It should be no surprise that socio-economic development has become the main focus of the policy of the majority of States and an area in which the United Nations will continue to have an important role to play.

It is undeniable that over the past decade the process of regionalization and globalization has transformed the world and benefitted many countries. But the side-effects and adverse consequences of this trend have also been increasingly evident. Obvious examples have indicated over the past two years that those consequences could destroy the achievements of long years of development and could lead to instability, locally and on a broader scale. The first victims are none other than the least developed countries: those that face the greatest

difficulties in their process of socio-economic development and that should have enjoyed greater attention and more favourable conditions in the process of regional and global integration. Those countries can and should count on United Nation support as they engage in this process.

The role of the United Nations is to promote interaction among peace, security and development in order to ensure that globalization and regionalization will not evolve in a way that is incompatible with the needs, levels of development and specific conditions of each State and each region. Only then will nations be able to contribute to that process and enjoy the legitimate and rightful benefits derived from it. Only then can equality be secured and the painful side-effect of this process, namely the widening gap between the rich and the poor, be addressed.

Despite the striking progress we have made on the long road of civilization, the end of the twentieth century is still marked by poverty and hunger, which are among the gravest tragedies and the greatest challenges facing mankind. Poverty and hunger not only lower living standards in certain countries; they have become a global problem, a factor for socio-political instability in many regions, and a problem that at present many countries cannot resolve by themselves. This problem will grow more serious if early efforts are not made to adequately address the adverse consequences of globalization and regionalization. Over the past half century, the United Nations and its specialized agencies have made an active and effective contribution to the fight against hunger and poverty; they have gained a great deal of valuable experience, of which the Organization should now make greater use. The eradication of hunger and the alleviation of poverty have become a primary, pressing task for the United Nations. They also form part of the Organization's responsibility towards Member countries that are now suffering under these twin scourges.

The United Nations has set as a target the halving world hunger and poverty by 2015. To this end, it is crucial that every country's internal resources be mobilized, but external cooperation to create an enabling environment for development is equally important; it is, indeed, indispensable. We are convinced that the United Nations could play an important role in promoting North-South cooperation by encouraging developed countries to expand direct investment, provide and secure long-term financing, open their own markets and grant preferential terms of trade to developing and least developed countries, fulfil their commitment of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance, promote technology transfer, support human-resource development, vocational education and training and join other countries in implementing the 20/20 initiative on social development, especially the commitments embodied in the October 1998 Hanoi declaration on the 20/20 initiative. Such support by the United Nations will facilitate every nation's efforts and will gradually and effectively tackle the issue of poverty and hunger.

The problems facing the United Nations at the turn of the century are large, complex and difficult. But, with the benefit of the experience of 54 years, the support of Member countries and the opportunities that mankind has generated, the Organization will be able to tackle them if United Nations reform is accelerated and implemented at an early date. In this regard, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to make the administrative structure more effective and to cut unnecessary spending.

We consider that United Nations reform involves enhancement of the role of the General Assembly, the principal organ in which the vast majority of members of the international community are represented, to reflect fully the principles of democracy and equality among Member States. Reform of the Security Council is the most important part of the process. Viet Nam's consistent view is that the Security Council needs to be made more representative by increasing the number of both permanent and non-permanent members and by bringing about greater democratization, transparency and accountability. Viet Nam is of the view that an indispensable element of reform is that a representative of the developing countries must be a permanent member of the Security Council.

With regard to the expansion of the Security Council, we support those candidates, such as India, Japan and Germany, that have the capacity to make a major contribution to the work of that important organ. At the same time, it should be stressed that the veto power should be used only in accordance with the letter and the spirit of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

Viet Nam welcomes the encouraging prospects of a peaceful settlement of conflicts and tensions in certain regions of the world, such as the Great Lakes region of Africa, and the resumption of the peace and reconciliation process in the Middle East. We follow with interest the developments in East Timor and hope that there will be no further complications, so that the

situation there can be stabilized soon, thus contributing to peace and stability in the region. Viet Nam calls for an early and complete end to the policy of embargo and blockade against Cuba and other countries. Such policies are not only outdated, but run counter to current trends towards democratization and equality in international relations, causing damage and suffering to the populations of the countries concerned, especially women, the elderly and children.

In South-East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region the economic recovery in many countries over the past year has restored confidence in the future. The countries of the region have learned lessons, found effective solutions and taken full advantage of assistance from the international community. As a result, the growth rate has gradually recovered; exports, cooperation and investment have step by step been revitalized. However, full economic recovery and overcoming the adverse impact of the crisis to ensure sustainable development is a continuing, long-term process, a challenge that the countries of the region must take up.

The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has taken new steps forward. The success of its sixth summit, held in Hanoi in December 1998, and the admission of Cambodia, which means that all 10 countries of the region are now members, have demonstrated a high level of unanimity and the determination and capacity of the ASEAN countries to promote solidarity, expand cooperation and overcome difficulties to give the group its appropriate role, status and strength. ASEAN with 10 members is now better placed to make its voice heard in international and regional forums, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Non-Aligned Movement, on regional and global problems pertaining to peace, security, development and the survival of humankind.

Maintaining peace and security in Asia in general, and in South-East Asia in particular, remains a shared concern of all member States. We hope that countries outside the region, especially the nuclear-weapon States, will cooperate with the South-East Asian countries for the implementation of the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty. This Treaty, which came into effect in 1997, reflects the keen desire of the South-East Asian countries for peace and security in the region, and their serious commitment to the disarmament goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world. We are pleased to note, and greatly appreciate, the support for the Treaty expressed by China and Russia.

When referring to the situation in the region, one cannot fail to mention the situation in the Eastern Sea — the South China Sea — where there are still incidents that cause concern to the countries of the region. Viet Nam believes that disputes in that sea should be settled by peaceful means, through bilateral and multilateral negotiations between the parties directly concerned, with respect for international law, especially the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1992 Declaration of ASEAN Foreign Ministers on the South China Sea. While seeking a lasting solution, all the parties concerned should exercise self-restraint, refrain from any act that may further complicate the situation and take confidence-building measures to ensure regional peace and stability, thus facilitating the search for fundamental, permanent solutions. In this regard, ASEAN's current efforts to draw up a code of conduct in the South China Sea, in accordance with the spirit of the sixth ASEAN summit, held in Hanoi, are a step in the right direction and a constructive measure, contributing to confidence-building and the peaceful settlement of disagreements in the region.

As a Member of the United Nations and the international community, Viet Nam has done its utmost, and will continue to do so, to contribute to the common work of humankind. Viet Nam's consistent position is to pursue an independent, sovereign foreign policy, seeking the multilateralization and diversification of external relations, with regional and global integration. It wishes to be the friend of all the members of the international community struggling for peace, independence and development. Viet Nam is an active member of ASEAN and APEC and is preparing to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) as soon as possible.

Viet Nam's diplomatic activities have been founded on the achievements recorded over the past 12 years in our work of national reconstruction, the industrialization and modernization of the country to achieve our goal of a wealthy people, a strong State and a just and advanced society. We have maintained a high rate of economic growth, reduced the poverty rate from 30 per cent in 1992 to 15.7 per cent at the end of 1998, and created more than a million jobs each year. These are tangible proofs of our economic and social development. The United Nations and its specialized agencies have greatly contributed to this achievement, as was acknowledged at the conference to review cooperation between Viet Nam and the United Nations development bodies, held in Hanoi two years ago. Furthermore, Viet Nam has, as a member of the Economic and Social Council and of the

United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund Executive Board, played an active part in the joint undertakings of the international community.

Viet Nam highly appreciates the role played by the United Nations in international life, both today and for tomorrow. It will make its contribution to the Organization's activities and will join other Members in rebuilding and renewing the United Nations so that it can live up to the expectations of Member States and their peoples, and meet the demands of our time.

During its more than five decades of existence as the world's largest international body the United Nations has made fundamental contributions to humankind's development in all areas and has created a legal framework for international relations. What the United Nations has achieved to date will come with us into the new century, along with the conviction that it will contribute to new achievements, to further progress and the resolution of outstanding differences between nations. While placing a great deal of hope in the United Nations, the Member States also understand that its effectiveness depends on the active participation of all of them.

Looking back over the path we have travelled, we now appreciate more than ever the role of the United Nations and its capability, as well as the complexity and tenacity of the problems before it. We can reaffirm that the United Nations — when it has been reformed on both the organizational and institutional levels and its objectives have been adjusted — will remain an irreplaceable organization. The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is entrusted with a great mandate: to complete the necessary preparations so that the United Nations can enter a new stage in its development.

Allow me to express from this rostrum our great confidence in the capability and crucial role of the United Nations to promote peace, security, cooperation and development for a better future for mankind. In this regard, Viet Nam pledges to work closely with other Member States to contribute actively to this noble cause, the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kenya, His Excellency The Honourable Bonaya Adhi Godana.

Mr. Godana (Kenya): May I, on behalf of my delegation congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Kenya's pride in seeing you preside over the affairs of the Assembly, which you have been associated with for so long, derives from our close and long bilateral ties with your great country.

I take this opportunity to register my delegation's appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for the able manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-third session.

We commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the effective and tireless manner in which he continues to manage the affairs of this Organization and encourage him to continue serving the international community with his characteristic selfless dedication to duty. Kenya will continue to support his efforts to further strengthen the Organization.

Kenya warmly welcomes the Republics of Kiribati and Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga into this family of nations.

As we approach the new millennium, there is need for us to reflect on the past, the present and the future of our world. The cumulative history of mankind during the current millennium has been characterized by the struggle of the human race to overcome the various problems of hunger, war and disease. Throughout time man has invested constantly to provide shelter, increase literacy and tackle the various problems of underdevelopment. The latter part of this millennium has witnessed enormous political, economic and social changes. Where once slavery was acceptable, today freedom is the norm. Where once crude methods of economic production dominated, today sophisticated production techniques govern. Where ignorance was widespread, today science and technology determine man's progress. Where before the human rights of peoples were unknown, today they are an integral part of the international agenda.

But even as we note the progress that has been made, the scourge of poverty and underdevelopment remains a painful reality for most of us. We believe that poverty is the root cause of the conflicts that pervade various regions of our globe, unleashing immense suffering on humankind — particularly on women and children.

Our continent, Africa, continues to suffer from the ravages of intra-State and inter-State conflicts. The issue of the complementarity of the roles of the United Nations and that of regional organizations needs to be addressed.

African countries have taken their own initiatives to resolve the various conflicts raging in the continent. Although progress has been made in some cases, many of the conflicts remain intractable, making it difficult for affected countries to redirect their efforts and resources towards economic development.

In our own region, together with other members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Kenya is seized with the conflicts in Sudan and Somalia. The subcommittee on the Sudan peace process, for example, is actively engaged in the search for a peaceful settlement to the conflict in the southern Sudan. At the most recent meeting, held in Nairobi from 19 to 23 July 1999, members of the IGAD ministerial subcommittee agreed to establish a secretariat to facilitate intensive and continuous negotiations to resolve this conflict. As chairman of this subcommittee, Kenya is optimistic that this new arrangement will contribute positively towards reaching a negotiated settlement. We hope we can count on the support of all the members of the international community to find a solution to this long-standing conflict.

Kenya continues to be seized with the situation in Somalia. As a neighbour that shares a border of 1,200 kilometres with Somalia, we are concerned at the loss of international interest and support for this sad country. The international community should resume its active interest and support for Somalia in order to instill in the innocent people of that country some measure of hope for the future. We are grateful for the roles that the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations have played and continue to play. However, Kenya calls for greater involvement by the United Nations in support of ongoing regional efforts. The new initiative unveiled by the Chairman of IGAD, President Guelleh of Djibouti, at this podium on 22 September 1999, deserves serious consideration.

In efforts to support and assist the people of Somalia, the territorial integrity of that country must be respected. Regional entities that may have come into existence during this period in Somalia's history should be seen as building blocks intended to eventually lead to a Government of national unity. We the neighbouring countries, as well as the international community, have an important role in facilitating the process leading to a peaceful and comprehensive settlement of the conflict. Our common commitment to a united Somalia should not waver.

In the tradition of African hospitality, Kenya has always provided a home to displaced people from neighbouring countries. As a result of the collapse of the central authority in Somalia, a large number of refugees found their way into our country. We are proud to have been able to assist and even settle some of them. In this regard, we are grateful for the role being played by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and many others who have provided invaluable assistance, without which it would have been impossible for the Government of Kenya alone to cope with the humanitarian crisis.

Recently, Kenya decided to tighten its border controls with Somalia. However, we remain committed to facilitating ongoing humanitarian operations, which continue with numerous daily flights into Somalia from our territory — and, in some cases, by land as well. We have been able to do this by coordinating our actions with the relevant humanitarian agencies and organizations.

The crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains of utmost concern to us because it poses a serious threat not only to the Great Lakes region but also to the rest of our continent. It is for this reason that Kenya has been involved in the attempts to resolve the conflict, particularly in its early, initial stages. Kenya's offer to host in Nairobi the proposed Congolese national debate on the political future of their country still stands. We commend the recent personal efforts that President Chiluba of Zambia has made in negotiating a settlement plan which seeks to find a comprehensive solution to that crisis. We will do everything possible to complement these efforts and hope that the international community will be prepared to fulfil its own supporting role.

As the international community continues to play its part, the responsibility for a final, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo falls largely to the people and their leaders. In that regard, Kenya urges all parties to the Lusaka Agreement to demonstrate their commitment by implementing it, both in letter and in spirit, in a timely and appropriate manner.

We firmly believe that it is time for the Security Council to actively step in and provide tangible support for the peace process. Africa expects that the support given to peacekeeping operations in other parts of the world will be replicated, both in scope and in content, in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We know that most members of the Security Council have embraced this challenge and are willing to do their part.

The situation in Angola continues to be a source of great frustration. Indeed, the resumption of hostilities at a level not seen since the signing of the Lusaka Protocol does not augur well. Kenya is deeply disappointed that the leader of UNITA, Mr. Savimbi, continues to flagrantly defy the collective will of the international community. We call on him to immediately cease all acts of hostility against the people of Angola.

With regard to the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, we note with satisfaction that the combined initiatives of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations and the United States to secure definitive agreement on the modalities for the implementation of the OAU Framework Agreement are still on course. We appeal to both parties to exercise utmost restraint and not to resume fighting.

In accordance with the United Nations Charter, the Security Council has the primary responsibility to determine the existence of any threat to international peace and security and to recommend appropriate intervention measures. There can be no derogation from this primary responsibility. In the fulfilment of this responsibility, it must be borne in mind that the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States remains a cardinal element in the conduct of international relations, as spelt out in the Charter.

We have serious reservations on the evolving view that even the United Nations Charter provides leeway for non-United Nations intervention. We would like to caution that this approach needs to be carefully balanced with legitimate concerns of sovereignty. Whatever we may say on intervention, the sovereignty of States remains at the core of diplomatic discourse. Derogation from this principle in the case of serious humanitarian emergencies must be made on the basis of general consensus in the United Nations.

It is in this spirit that Kenya has always supported and participated in many United Nations peacekeeping missions throughout the world. We will continue to contribute personnel and remain actively involved in United Nations peacekeeping activities. All peacekeeping missions must be established in accordance with the United Nations Charter. This is why we welcome the assumption of responsibility in Kosovo by the United Nations in the form of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). We should do everything possible to support efforts towards the restoration of normalcy in Kosovo. We also hope that the spirit that prevailed in the establishment and financing of UNMIK will be applied to peacekeeping operations in Africa.

Mr. Bovah-Kamon (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

With regard to the situation in East Timor, Kenya commends Indonesia for allowing the international community to send a United Nations — mandated multinational force to restore order. We welcome the unequivocal statement by the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Mr. Ali Alatas, reiterating his Government's responsibility to ensure the fulfilment of the newly expressed will of the majority of East Timorese to seek a new destiny outside the Indonesian Republic. We hope, as he expressed the hope, that the parting of ways will, in his own words, proceed honourably, peacefully and amicably.

As Sierra Leone continues along the path of national reconciliation and true peace, we encourage the United Nations to remain committed to and engaged in that country. We again place on record our appreciation to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for its immense sacrifice in assisting the people of Sierra Leone in their search for peace and democracy. On our part, we will continue to support our brothers and sisters in that country. Towards that end, we have already contributed personnel to the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL).

Kenya is encouraged by the recent positive developments in the Middle East peace process. The resumption of direct dialogue between the State of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, which resulted in agreement on the implementation of aspects of the Wye accords, demonstrates the vast opportunities that political goodwill can unleash. We encourage those involved to stay on course and we welcome indications that the other tracks in the Middle East peace process are receiving careful attention.

On the economic front, my delegation is of the view that the slow progress in Africa's efforts to attain sustainable economic growth and development is directly related to the failure by the international community to mobilize adequate resources for development. This has been aggravated by situations of internal conflict and the prevalence of such diseases as malaria and AIDS, among others, which are compounded in turn by the shackles of

poverty and deprivation and an unfavourable external economic environment.

My delegation welcomes the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt (HIPC) Initiative made at the G-8 meeting in Cologne, Germany. The crushing burden of external debt on the developing countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, remains a major obstacle to our development efforts. While we welcome this Initiative, we are of the view that much still needs to be done. We would like to see HIPC coverage broadened to include more of the indebted countries, with relief being offered in a graduated manner. This would envisage providing the greatest relief to the most indebted countries. In addition, consideration could be given to modifying the existing terms and conditions of HIPC to enable countries like Kenya, not covered by HIPC as currently proposed, to participate without the possibility of losing access to credit that would otherwise be available to them. The terms and conditions of the HIPC Initiative are based on a piecemeal approach which will not contribute to the overall goal of debt cancellation. Debt-relief measures should be structured in a holistic and comprehensive manner without eroding Africa's future capacity to attract investments and should be linked to the long-term social and economic development of the continent.

Another issue that requires the concerted efforts of the international community is that of poverty eradication. Kenya has already launched a Poverty Eradication Plan, which has received some support and which we hope will attract wider support to allow us to achieve our goal of becoming a newly industrialized country by the year 2020. Bold actions are required to ensure that the developed countries fulfil the commitments agreed upon to maintain official development assistance flows to developing countries at 0.7 per cent of their gross national product. In this regard, Kenya supports the proposal to hold an international conference on financing for development next year.

The United Nations remains our only hope to spearhead the process of development. Accordingly, all Member States have an obligation to support the Organization in order for it to fulfil its development mandate. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other specialized bodies — such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) — must be strengthened in order to enable them to succeed in their respective roles.

Kenya looks forward to the convening of the first South-South summit in Havana, Cuba, in April next year. The conference will be a historic milestone in the strengthening of South-South cooperation. The South-South summit provides a golden opportunity at the highest political level for the members of the Group of 77 and China to share their experiences and to consolidate political goodwill, which is so vital for economic cooperation and development.

Kenya attaches great importance to economic cooperation among developing countries. It is for this reason that Kenya has actively pursued the path of economic integration at the regional and subregional levels. In addition to the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), comprising 21 countries with a population approaching 400 million, we are determined, at the subregional level, to upgrade the East African cooperation arrangements — comprising Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania — into a full-fledged East African community by the end of the year. Our vision is to establish an East African community with a population of nearly 90 million people with natural, historic, social and cultural ties into one investment destination, one tourist destination, one single market and one common external tariff, with a free flow of goods, services and people.

Kenya is greatly concerned by the rise in transnational crime, narcotics, money-laundering and terrorism networks. The tragic bombing of the embassies of the United States of America in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam in August 1998 is still fresh in our memories. This incident, not to mention the recent terrorist attacks in Moscow, has heightened our resolve to work closely with the international community to fight and eradicate terrorism. We call for concerted efforts to adopt effective international measures to eradicate the growing and dangerous links between terrorist groups, drug traffickers and armed criminal elements. Towards this end, Kenya participated actively in the Algiers summit of OAU in July 1999, at which African States adopted a convention on preventing and combating terrorism. Clearly, more needs to be done. We support the proposal to hold an international conference next year on combating terrorism.

Kenya is situated in the heart of a turbulent region. The proliferation of illegal small arms and their increased

criminal use on Kenyan territory, often by groups from across our borders, is motivating us to push for practical and sustained international cooperation to stop illegal trafficking in small arms. In this connection, we express our support for the convening of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects to be held by the year 2001.

In our own region, Kenya will host a meeting before the end of this year to address the complex problems of small arms and their ramifications for security and conflicts in our region. We look forward to the support and cooperation of our development partners to ensure that this conference is a success.

On this issue, Kenya would like to draw a clear distinction between the legitimate rights of sovereign States to self-defence and therefore to the procurement of armaments for that purpose, and the illicit traffic in small arms involving non-State actors.

Kenya welcomes the urgency and importance with which the international community has recently addressed the problem of antipersonnel landmines. We participated actively in the negotiations leading to the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines and in the recent Maputo Conference of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention. We have signed the Ottawa Convention, which is now going through the ratification process. The prevailing international consensus on outlawing landmines must be maintained in order to achieve the target of a total ban on the production, use and eventual elimination of anti-personnel landmines. International cooperation is essential in the areas of landmine clearance and the physical rehabilitation of victims, as well as their social and economic rehabilitation and reintegration.

As we celebrate the United Nations Decade of International Law, Kenya regards the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court as a historic milestone in the progressive development of international law. We participated actively in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the Rome Statute, became the eighty-fourth State to append our signature to it and have embarked on the ratification process for it.

We look to the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court to elaborate on the outstanding issues, including the elements of crime and the rules of procedure, in order to reach an early consensus and ensure universal acceptance of the Statute. We hope that the Preparatory Commission will complete its work before the June 2000 deadline.

As eloquently stated by the Secretary-General, reform of the United Nations is a process and not an event. In order to attain a more transparent, accountable and democratic United Nations, the collective resolve of its Member States is imperative. We must resist any attempts to approach the reform process in terms of downsizing: reform must entail restructuring to cope better with the immense economic development challenges facing our world, and the success of the reform effort must be measured in terms of the Organization's capacity to deliver programmes, strengthen the Secretariat, enhance its strategic orientation and use the development dividend to enhance socio-economic development in all our countries. In this context, Kenya welcomes the appointment of Dr. Klaus Töpfer as Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi. As host to the only United Nations headquarters in the developing world, we continue to be greatly concerned by the underutilization of the excellent conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. Practical plans are urgently required to place the Nairobi Office on the same level as the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna by providing it with adequate resources and personnel to enable it to carry out its functions effectively.

The changes that have taken place in international relations need to be reflected in the composition and structure of the Security Council. The Security Council is a body that is empowered to make important executive decisions on matters of peace and security on behalf of the entire membership of the United Nations. It is imperative that the reform of the Security Council should ensure greater accountability and democracy together with equitable representation. The universal and democratic nature of the United Nations should be preserved and reforms introduced to ensure fair representation of all the major geographic regions of the world.

A strong and persuasive case has been made by African countries for at least two seats in the permanent membership of the Security Council. Our recent experience as a nonpermanent member of the Council has convinced us of the urgency of restructuring this important organ so that developing countries can play their rightful part in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Kenya is of the view that sanctions should be imposed only in accordance with the Charter and only after all means for the pacific settlement of disputes under Chapter VI have been exhausted. A thorough study of the short- and long-term effects of sanctions, especially on innocent victims, should be undertaken. The objectives of sanctions should be clearly defined and the sanctions should be lifted as soon as those objectives have been achieved. Sanctions should be imposed for a specified time, and the conditions to be met by the country or party on which sanctions are imposed must be clearly defined and subjected to periodic review. We reject any attempts to impose or prolong the application of sanctions for reasons other than the specified objectives.

The application of sanctions usually has profound effects not only on the target countries but also on their neighbouring countries and other trading partners. Efforts should therefore be made to put Article 50 of the Charter, which refers to third States, into operation by establishing mechanisms or Funds to provide them with relief. In this regard, Kenya urges that the sanctions on Iraq should be urgently reviewed with a view to their suspension and eventual lifting. We also hope that the sanctions on Libya, recently suspended, will soon be lifted.

As we enter the twenty-first century, it is hard to imagine what this world would be without the United Nations. Consider for a moment the number of lives that have been saved by the Organization; the personal freedoms that many countries and individuals now enjoy; and the diseases that have been controlled or eliminated: the list of successes is endless. But much still needs to be done: the Secretary-General's proposal for a Millennium Assembly, with a millennium summit as an integral part, would provide an important forum for us to reexamine the role of the Organization and chart our path for the next millennium. Kenya will play its part.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, Mr. David Andrews.

Mr. Andrews (Ireland): Mr. President, I congratulate you, the Foreign Minister of Namibia, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Your experience as the Namibian people's chief representative in New York during your country's struggle for independence and your role in guiding Namibia into the family of nations will serve you well in directing the important work of this session.

Our thanks are also due to Foreign Minister Opertti of Uruguay for his dedicated efforts in leading the Assembly over the past 12 months. I, too, would like to warmly welcome our three new Members to the United Nations, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

In January of this year, my Government had the privilege of hosting a visit by Secretary-General Annan. As the first United Nations Secretary-General to emerge from within the international civil service, his personal commitment to the United Nations and its founding principles is evidenced in his efforts to steer the Organization into the new millennium.

My colleague Foreign Minister Halonen of Finland set out the views of the European Union on the main challenges facing the international community today, and, of course, Ireland fully associates itself with our respected Finnish Presidency's remarks.

The responsibility of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security has been severely tested this year. In Africa, in the Balkans and, most recently, in East Timor, we have seen bloody and vicious outbreaks of violence which could have been avoided. At the same time, the incidence and scale of natural disasters has increased, adding to the pressures facing the already overstretched relief agencies. We need to take up the challenge which the Secretary-General set out in his thought-provoking address earlier this week — to think anew about how the United Nations and the Member States respond to the political, human rights and humanitarian crises affecting so much of the world. We are all haunted by the collective failure to prevent humanitarian disasters — including genocide — as well as the outbreak of conflict in many regions.

The case for better prevention strategies is overwhelming. Even the costliest policy of prevention is far cheaper, in lives and resources, than the least expensive use of armed force. It is simply unacceptable that the United Nations should be starved of the resources that are vital to this conflict prevention. Where conflict prevention fails, more fundamental questions relating to capabilities for crisis management arise. How is it possible, for example, that the international community finds itself repeatedly incapable of taking effective action? How has it come to pass that questions are being raised about the adequacy of the Charter itself? Or that the constraints impairing the effectiveness of the Organization have led to searching elsewhere for

effective response? It is indeed a paradox that, in a world of unprecedented interdependence and technological capabilities, we should be confronted by such a dilemma.

The Charter, I think, has been fairly described as a "living document". I believe that this provides the key to resolving our dilemma. We have not used sufficiently the possibilities that already exist under the Charter, not only in the area of peace and security, but also in the social and economic fields. I would suggest that we should scrutinize its provisions and use them imaginatively. That could make possible a reinvigoration of the United Nations, injecting a new sense of purpose and a new dynamic.

I believe we should similarly look to see how we can support the Secretary-General in his immense labours. His report on the work of the Organization has diagnosed accurately the challenges that exist and has genuinely pointed out what needs to be done. He has powers under the Charter, and he should be encouraged to use them to the full. Greater empowerment of the Secretary-General is one practical step that we, the Member States, should take.

We should seize the opportunity provided by the Millennium Assembly next year to reaffirm our commitment to the goals and principles set out in the Charter, in a pragmatic, action-oriented and forward-looking manner.

We can learn, as has been said by previous speakers, from the crisis in East Timor. As the Personal Representative of the European Union Presidency, I witnessed at first hand the consultation process on 30 August. I wish particularly to pay tribute to the outstanding work of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET). It has received criticism, and I reject that criticism. I saw the work at first hand. They were an unarmed force — a group of very brave men and women. Men and women of my own country were among that very brave group of people, and I salute them.

Ireland, together with our European Union partners, is fully committed to seeing that the people of East Timor enjoy the independence which they have freely chosen. The poll itself took place peacefully in a fair and free manner — we witnessed it first hand — and reflected, as I understand it, the views of the people. It was, however, followed by systematic and ruthless attacks on the population. We have condemned these atrocities in the strongest terms. The perpetrators of crimes against humanity must be brought to justice. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, has called for an international commission of inquiry, and, of course, we all fully support this, as I understand it.

Had those seeking to frustrate and overturn the process initiated by President Habibie last January succeeded, they would have denied the democratic rights of the people of East Timor, posing a very serious challenge to the credibility and authority of the United Nations. I welcome the decisive action taken by the Security Council which led to the adoption of its resolution 1264 (1999), although I regret that this action could not have been taken more speedily. I pay sincere tribute to all involved, and in particular to the members of the Security Council mission who went to Jakarta and Dili in very very difficult circumstances. I pay sincere tribute to all involved. All of the provisions of Security Council resolution 1264 (1999) must now be fully implemented in all respects, as it says, and as is required by it.

We fully support the deployment of the international force for East Timor under the leadership of Australia. Ireland is among the contributors to this force.

We are facing a humanitarian disaster in both East and West Timor. All East Timorese refugees, wherever they are, must be allowed to return to their homes. The response that is now being made will go some way to restoring the credibility and authority of this Organization at a time when the restoration of that credibility and authority is so urgently required. In Ireland we will be continuing to support, in every way we can, the work of the United Nations and, of course, the international humanitarian agencies in East Timor.

The dilemma which I earlier described is also illustrated clearly by the response to crises in many parts of Africa, as has been outlined by so many other speakers, and by the previous speaker in particular, my colleague Foreign Minister Godana of Kenya. This response has in the past been totally inadequate, leading in turn to further conflict, human suffering and neglect on an even greater scale.

I welcome the steps recently taken towards national reconciliation in a number of the African countries, including, as was mentioned by the previous speaker, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The patient diplomacy and determination of individual African leaders has laid the groundwork for the resolution of a number of recent conflicts. We received

a timely reminder of these efforts a few days ago from President Chiluba of Zambia in his excellent address to the Security Council. But these efforts deserve and require the support and commitment of the international community. The Secretary-General's report on conflict prevention in Africa has set out clear goals and proposals on the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, and we must all ensure that real progress is achieved on these issues.

Countries emerging from conflict situations, in particular, face the need to rebuild lives and livelihoods. Many of these are among the poorest Member States. In that context, I wish to highlight the extent of the debt burden on developing countries, particularly on the heavily indebted poor countries — the so-called HIPC countries. Servicing this debt deprives many of these nations of scarce resources, resources which are required to meet the most basic human needs, and some of the debt repayments based on the moneys given to some of these countries are nothing short of disgraceful.

The launch of the joint World Bank/International Monetary Fund Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative two years ago gave hope that substantive action would at last be taken to relieve the debt crisis, particularly the large and growing burden of multilateral debt. Some progress has been made, but, unfortunately again, in the nature of those institutions — and I do not say it by way of great criticism — there is a slowness in their movement. That is why the Initiative has benefited so few of the countries to which it is directed. We need to extend it to more countries, with a greater degree of flexibility, and maybe a little bit of imagination.

Ireland wishes to see the strongest possible link between debt relief and poverty alleviation. It is the poorest and most marginalized who have borne much of the burden. I saw this in recent visits to a number of these countries in Africa. We recognize the strength of international concern about the debt of poor countries, including the urgent demands for debt forgiveness. The Irish Government decided last year to direct resources to both bilateral and multilateral debt relief, and also to make it integral to Ireland's overall development cooperation strategy. The goal of poverty reduction, the primary focus of this strategy, cannot be met without concerted international action to stem the haemorrhage of resources caused by this burden.

Ireland regrets the decline in flows of official development assistance to what can only be described as historic lows. This situation must be reversed. Developing countries, especially the poorest among them, need international solidarity now more than ever.

The forthcoming special session on small island developing States is an important opportunity to focus international attention on countries with which Ireland has a natural affinity. Remote from major markets and ecologically fragile, they face the twin challenges of globalization and climate change. Ireland recognizes their unique situation and supports further work on an index which would reflect their vulnerability.

The special session should give a renewed impetus to the Barbados Programme of Action — a Programme that I salute. The small island States, particularly the poorest, must not be further marginalized. For our part, we have placed a new emphasis on small island developing States in our multilateral aid programme. We are also working with our partners in the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries towards a successful conclusion — a just and equitable conclusion — of the post-Lomé negotiations.

The scourge of drug trafficking is a global problem which affects us all. Ireland is fully committed to the fight against drugs and to supporting the efforts of those countries which are already very much affected by this heinous traffic.

Full respect for human rights is of fundamental importance to the achievement of all our other goals. As this millennium draws to a close, a series of the most barbaric violations of human rights imaginable in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo and now in East Timor are testaments to our inhumanity to one another.

The Secretary-General has produced a compelling report (S/1999/957) to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We must address, with the utmost speed and seriousness, the Secretary-General's recommendations which are aimed at creating, in his words, a "climate of compliance" with international human rights and humanitarian standards, as set out. The Secretary-General has rightly placed great stress on the necessity to enhance efforts aimed at conflict prevention. His recommendations offer us an opportunity to redeem the pledges we made last year on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is imperative that the Statute of the International Criminal Court enter into force as soon as possible. A global enforcement mechanism which addresses impunity could also serve as a deterrent to genocide and crimes against humanity, some of which I have just articulated.

Ireland will shortly assume the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, an important political forum for enhancing democratic values and stability throughout the continent of Europe. We will seek to promote further cooperation between the Council of Europe and the United Nations in areas of common interest.

The shadow of nuclear weapons hangs over us all as we enter the new millennium. We can no longer remain complacent at the absence of progress towards the early elimination of nuclear arsenals. The limited steps that have been taken to date — which we welcome — do not amount to a determined process of elimination.

Intent on securing a new consensus on the way forward, I and my colleagues from Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden last year launched an initiative called "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: the need for a new agenda".

With the adoption of a resolution on the new agenda in the General Assembly, the international community has demanded a clear perspective for the closure of the nuclear-weapons era.

The approach of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) 2000 Review Conference underlines the imperatives of a fundamental change in approach. We require a new commitment on the part of the nuclear-weapon States. This would make the elimination of these weapons an immediate objective rather than an ultimate goal.

Earlier this year I had the honour of participating in the first meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held in Maputo. The conclusion of the global ban on landmines is, of course, one of the striking achievements of our time. In this I salute the leadership of Canada, working with determined Governments, including my own, and in cooperation with the non-governmental community. It is the clearest demonstration of what can be achieved when the political will exists.

The spread of small arms and the consequences for civilian populations in armed conflict must be confronted now. This traffic in arms is an obscenity and, in many cases, totally and absolutely irresponsible; its brokers know no morality. We must redouble our efforts to address both the supply and demand sides of a threat to the security of civilians that has reached epidemic proportions.

We in Ireland are proud of our contribution to world peace through peacekeeping. Just under a year ago Ireland became a full participant in the United Nations standby arrangements system. We currently contribute to eight peacekeeping operations, with over 700 personnel in the field. Our largest commitment is to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon. Our service has not, of course, been without cost. To date 78 Irish peacekeepers have paid the highest price in the service of the United Nations.

The changing and more complex nature of peacekeeping involves additional tasks, such as humanitarian assistance, the protection of human rights and civilian police work. Through our participation in the multinational forces operating under United Nations authorization in Kosovo, and soon in East Timor, Ireland is already playing its part in these new arrangements. Our commitment to United Nations peacekeeping remains, as ever, strong, steadfast and loyal.

I will conclude by giving a short resume of the situation in Northern Ireland. A number of speakers have referred to the peace process in Northern Ireland during the course of their contributions to this session of the General Assembly, and I very deeply appreciate their remarks in that regard. Their support and, indeed, all the support of all the nations in the United Nations is very deeply appreciated.

I will now turn to the evolving situation in that part of my benighted land, Northern Ireland. When I spoke here last year, I was honoured to be the first Minister to be able to report that a comprehensive and broadly based political accommodation had been reached, that is, the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998. The Agreement was reached by the British and Irish Governments and by eight political parties in Northern Ireland following almost two years of intensive negotiations. It was subsequently endorsed by the people of the island with decisive majorities in referendums held in both the north and south, an average between the two parts of the island in the nature of 72 per cent for a permanent peace on the island of Ireland and in favour of the Good Friday Agreement. As I say, it was subsequently endorsed by

the people of the island with a decisive majority in a combined context, which I have just spoken about, namely, referendums in the north and south. The Agreement covers not just constitutional issues and political institutions, but a wide range of other matters essential to conflict resolution and the promotion of a fair and just society.

All of us gathered here know, often from direct experience, that, though it can be hard to reach an agreement, it is often harder still to implement it. I doubt very much if anyone in Ireland expected the path ahead to be smooth and straight. While very substantial progress has been made, there continue to be frustrations and, of course, difficulties, and I would not seek to minimize the problems we face. But there is still much that is valuable and encouraging.

It is true that the peace we have remains imperfect, and there can be no tolerable or acceptable level of violence. In places, tensions between the two communities are worryingly high. But, overall, Northern Ireland is more peaceful than it has been at any time for a generation. Relationships between the two parts of Ireland, and between Britain and Ireland, are closer and more relaxed than they have ever been. And the longer it continues, it is peace which becomes the norm. The people were always entitled to peace. My belief is that now they are coming to expect it. I am confident that no attempt to return to the full-scale violence of the past would win any meaningful support or could be sustained for long. We have turned the corner and there can be no going back.

During the past year, much good work has been done to carry the Agreement forward. For instance, its human rights and equality provisions are being given concrete effect, as are measures to promote cultural equality and reconciliation and to assist the victims of violence. The independent commission established under the Agreement to make recommendations on a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland has recently produced an excellent and thorough report on this very sensitive and important issue. The Irish Government looks forward to playing our part in its implementation.

Moreover, the Governments and the parties in the north have completed all of the preparatory technical work necessary to establish the new political institutions envisaged by the Agreement. You can understand, therefore, the disappointment we feel that it has not yet proved possible actually to establish those political institutions. While there is disagreement among some political parties on the precise relationship between the formation of an inclusive executive within Northern Ireland and the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, there is no difference of view on the desirability of both objectives. However, there is a persistent mutual distrust and lack of confidence, with doubts about future intentions continuing to linger.

Under the dedicated and committed leadership of the Taoiseach — my Prime Minister, Mr. Bertie Ahern — and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, the Irish and British Governments and all the parties have devoted enormous energy to the task of seeking to find a generally acceptable way forward. But so far, despite some progress, we have not succeeded in bridging that particular gap. For that reason, we have invited Senator George Mitchell of the United States, who chaired with such skill and judgement the talks which led to the Good Friday Agreement itself, to act as a facilitator of a review. That review is now under way. There is no good reason why it should fail. I cannot believe that is in the interests of anyone that it should fail.

The institutional blueprint sketched out in the Agreement and endorsed by the people offers the only rational basis for a lasting peace and for reconciliation through practical partnership and common action. No other conceivable course of action represents a remotely satisfactory alternative. Whatever the short-term difficulties, the Irish Government, in continued cooperation with the British Government, will not cease to work for its implementation.

It is not surprising that the stalemate of the past months has led to some doubt and, indeed, disillusionment. But I am convinced that there remains a huge reservoir of support for the Agreement within both the unionist and nationalist communities, provided each can be confident that all aspects will be implemented in full. People are open to persuasion if a reasonable accommodation is on offer. There is therefore an onus on all political representatives to be generous and creative and to be prepared to offer leadership to their own constituencies while reaching out to others — not recklessly, but courageously and honourably.

I am convinced that there will be no return to our often bitter past. But it will be possible to realize the full potential of the future only when the Good Friday Agreement is implemented as a totality. The Agreement offers a bold and generous vision of tolerance and partnership between those who together share the island of Ireland. Moreover, it offers a framework within which

profound differences can be accommodated without coercion and on the basis of consent. Those of us from within the Irish nationalist tradition value the unionist tradition. We have come to understand, to cherish and to respect its authenticity and, of course, its validity. It is a vital and irreplaceable strand of that diversity of cultures and identities which makes up Ireland as it really is.

All over the world, we can see the tragic consequences of policies of domination and exclusion. The future of Ireland can be, should be and, I believe, will be radically different. That is why the task of implementing the Agreement should be completed now, and not left to another generation.

In conclusion, as we go forward we know that we retain the support and solidarity of the international community. In this regard I would like to pay particular tribute to the role of the United States and, of course, of President Bill Clinton, who has stood steadfastly beside us throughout the historic process in which we have been engaged. As always, we are deeply grateful for the encouragement of all of our friends, which is and will continue to be hugely important to us.

As we benefit from the support of the international community, I wish in turn to pledge Ireland's continuing commitment to the fulfilment of the aims and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Acting President *(spoke in French)*: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Benin, Mr. Kolawolé Idji.

Mr. Idji (Benin) *(spoke in French)*: In taking the floor on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Benin, I would like first of all to express my heartiest congratulations to the entire Bureau of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. I would also like to express my satisfaction at seeing the Foreign Minister of Namibia, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, presiding over the Assembly at this session, the last of the century and of the closing millennium.

At a time when the United Nations more than ever is called upon to act in the interest of the peace and well-being of humankind, Benin takes pride in seeing a representative of Africa holding that important post. I would assure him of my delegation's full cooperation and support, for it will be under his enlightened presidency that the Organization will stride forward into the twenty-first century. We see this felicitous and remarkable coincidence as a definite assurance of the success of the important debates we will be holding and a sign of hope that the decisions to be taken will so direct our actions as to ensure that the coming century is one of peace, progress and development, for the African continent in particular.

Allow me at this stage to pay tribute to Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, for the outstanding work he did in the service of the Organization throughout the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. I wish also to pay a highly deserved tribute to our brother, Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for the unstinting devotion that he has demonstrated since his election and for the undeniable successes that he has achieved for the United Nations in particularly difficult circumstances.

I should like here to reaffirm the full support and confidence of the Government of Benin as we pursue the lofty and legitimate goal of giving the United Nations the means of tackling the challenges that await us on the threshold of the first century of the new millennium.

I should like also to congratulate and warmly welcome the three new States Members of the United Nations — the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

This session of the General Assembly is beginning at a particularly important moment in the history of humankind, for, after a century of deeds and events fraught with all kinds of consequences, the entire international community is preparing to move forward into the first century of a new millennium. We who have been privileged to witness this twofold historical transition should not ignore the great responsibility that we have borne throughout the century that is now closing and the equal responsibility that we will have to shoulder throughout the one that is about to begin.

The challenges that face us are many and range across all human areas of activity. It is our conviction that if we so desire, we can make the next century an era of peace, security, development, understanding and concord among peoples. In order to do this, we will have to promote and strengthen worldwide cooperation, in particular in tackling the serious problems that the century that is now ending will have bequeathed to the one that is now beginning.

Combating poverty should, it seems to me, be one of our priorities, because poverty is a factor of

destabilization and a source of conflict and war, particularly in Africa.

The holding of the millennium summit in September 2000 will be a historic opportunity for us to strive to strengthen peace, security and stability, for which all peoples of the world yearn.

We could hardly overemphasize the close relationship among development, peace, security, democracy and human rights, and we all share the responsibility of day by day translating these words into reality. We can overcome poverty.

The international community is in a position to put an end to the atrocities and the savagery that have been on the rise recently in all continents. To this end, it is essential for the process of revitalization, restructuring and democratization in the world Organization, begun under the authority of the Secretary-General, to be continued so as to enhance its effectiveness in carrying out the urgent tasks that it will face at the beginning of the third millennium.

Benin is at peace within its borders, with its neighbours and with the whole of the international community. But we are seriously disturbed by the appalling conflicts that continue to devastate and destabilize our continent.

We are ready to continue to support the efforts of Africa itself and those of the great Powers in the context of the prevention, settlement and sustainable management of conflicts.

Here I wish to pay tribute to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and certain subregional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community for their bold initiatives aimed at bringing peace and security to Africa.

I have no wish to forget or to minimize the contribution of other countries, but I wish in particular to pay tribute here to the tremendous sacrifices made by the peoples of West Africa and in particular by the people of Nigeria in the context of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to help the West African subregion to put an end to war and insecurity, which hamper development and economic progress.

I wish also to welcome the bold resolutions adopted by the Heads of States at the OAU Summit in Algiers, as well as the initiatives of the subregional organizations in West Africa and in the Great Lakes region, which attest to strengthened political resolve to reverse the course of events in a positive and constructive direction. These endeavours deserve to be sustained and strengthened by international solidarity.

The example of Kosovo is there to remind us of the key importance of prompt and determined action on the part of the international community in order to restore and maintain peace. The distressing events in East Timor are another eloquent example of this.

Allow me in all honesty to state here that human rights are universal and indivisible. If we wish to build a united and peaceful international community, let us not introduce into the defence, protection and promotion of human rights any conditionalities or preferences, be they geographical, cultural, geostrategic or others.

In this age of rapid globalization, we must realize that the risk of marginalizing the weakest economies and the most vulnerable peoples is very real; it is a mortal danger. Fortunately, there is still time to avert it. If we are to succeed, our vision for the twenty-first century and our prospects for the future must be clarified and strengthened by the effective implementation of the various plans and programmes of action adopted since the beginning of this decade within the framework of the United Nations system.

In this context, the situation of the developing countries, the least developed countries in particular, deserves more attention from the international community, which should endeavour to create favourable conditions for those countries to develop. In this respect, we cannot evade the anguished question of the future of Africa on the threshold of the third millennium, particularly given the debt burden and the deterioration in the terms of trade. These are sad realities which are killing at least as many people as are dying from AIDS.

Fortunately indeed, Africa can cease to be the continent of bad news. Today, it has the ability and the will to make it so. Throughout the decade that is now drawing to a close, the international community has repeatedly stated that Africa must be a priority. Mindful of the need for that continent to achieve economic progress, the United Nations has worked out appropriate strategies and embarked on specific development programmes. But none of those initiatives will have any impact on the development of the continent if African

countries themselves, supported by their development partners, do not redouble their efforts to carry out the necessary reforms and mobilize the necessary resources.

While we clearly reaffirm our own responsibility, we must also say that for Africa better economic performance necessarily involves a rapid and lasting solution to the problems caused by external debt; inputs of the new and additional financial resources required to meet the growing need for funding; transfers of new and appropriate technology; promotion of a genuine, open and fair system of international trade; and appropriate incentives for our efforts to diversify and modernize our economies. What we need in this age of globalization is a genuine solidarity pact.

This new partnership with Africa should set out to enable all African countries to enjoy the benefits of globalization. This implies mobilizing and pooling the efforts of the whole international community, inspired by the same vision of a common destiny and a new philosophy of sharing. That vision of development prompted the Government of Benin to host, in February 1999 in Cotonou, a conference of United Nations Development Programme Resident Representatives working in Africa to consider the problems of development in Africa in the coming millennium. The conference identified the major problems that African countries face at the close of the twentieth century: social and political upheaval; poverty; problems of access in meeting essential social needs; population pressure; the debt burden; and economic marginalization, among others. The conference also highlighted the assets and potential of the continent: significant natural and human resources; cultural wealth; a spirit of sharing; and a sense of solidarity.

Accordingly, the conference recommended another approach for Africa's development, based on the promotion of peace and security within and between States; real integration of Africa into the world economy; and the creation of an African regional observatory for globalization. It would be regrettable if these highly lucid and relevant analyses and findings came to nothing because the United Nations Development Programme itself is stifled by a lack of resources.

In keeping with those recommendations, Benin, together with several other African countries, has undertaken far-reaching political and economic reforms to improve the living and working conditions of its people, particularly those in rural areas. The measures include action to stabilize public finances, liberalize the economy, develop the private sector, stimulate economic growth, combat corruption and preserve social peace and political stability through the establishment of a State based on the rule of law that respects democratic principles and fundamental rights and freedoms.

Against that background we are striving, tirelessly and resolutely, to ensure that the democratic process takes firm root in Benin. Our young democracy has just successfully completed an electoral process culminating in the renewal of Parliament before the deadline set by the Constitution. In a few months' time we will be holding local elections to elect mayors and councillors to help entrench democracy at the grass-roots level.

However, despite these significant efforts and sacrifices, we know that our political and economic structures will continue to be fragile and vulnerable so long as poverty and disease continue to lay waste to our towns and countryside, so long as HIV/AIDS is not conquered or, at least, contained at the same levels as in Europe and America, and so long as insecurity and appalling internal and regional conflicts continue to undo the work of the African peoples and enrich a few arms manufacturers and traffickers.

I should like to extend the recognition and gratitude of the people and Government of Benin to all its development partners, to the Powers which have realized that today poverty more than ever is a matter for all of us, wherever it may be found, and that violations of human rights involve us all wherever they may take place. I wish once again to express our thanks to all those who are assisting us in our activities aimed at making Benin, indeed Africa in general, a haven of peace, political stability and successful, integrated development.

During its fifty-first session, the General Assembly accepted Benin's offer to hold the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies and encouraged it to do so, no doubt because of our efforts, which I have just outlined, to maintain peace, democracy and the constitutional rule of law. I am convinced that the fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies — the first that Africa will have the honour and privilege of hosting, following the conferences held in the Philippines, Nicaragua and Romania — will be an opportunity for all the friends of Africa — indeed, all the friends of democracy — to pool their experience and to work together to consolidate a political system that,

unfortunately, is not yet the most widespread of phenomena. The Cotonou conference, scheduled for early December 2000, can have significance and impact only if all democrats agree to make a sincere contribution; this would enable democracy all over the world to take a crucial qualitative leap forward.

For this reason, I fervently appeal to all those of goodwill, and to all development partners eager that democracy, the rule of law and good governance should be solidly established in every one of our States and on all continents, to lend their material and financial support and their experience to the preparation, organization and convening of the Cotonou conference. We earnestly hope that the Cotonou conference will enable us to build on existing achievements in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Peace, security and sustainable human development are the themes that my delegation would like to see as the banner of this session of the General Assembly, the last before the year 2000: peace above all, so that the founding cry of this Organization, "never again", may in the new millennium become a reality for all peoples and for all individuals.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call next on the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, His Excellency Mr. Alfred Mubanda.

Mr. Mubanda (Uganda): On behalf of the delegation of Uganda, I should like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab and all the Vice-Presidents on their election to guide the deliberations of the General Assembly at its last session of this century. I also thank the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session for the effective manner in which he discharged his responsibilities.

Allow me also to pay a well-deserved tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts on behalf of the United Nations, especially in the area of the maintenance of international peace and security.

Uganda is pleased to welcome to membership of the United Nation the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

At the end of this turbulent century and on the eve of what my delegation hopes will be a more peaceful and prosperous new century, the United Nations stands out as the best hope for the future of humankind, international cooperation and solidarity. Uganda believes that a strong and effective United Nations is the best guarantor of world peace and the most effective instrument to prevent another world war. My Government is therefore determined to play a constructive role in ensuring that the United Nations of the twenty-first century will be increasingly dedicated to the noble principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter. Those principles and purposes, which have stood the test of time, must continue to serve the peoples of the world and guide this world Organization.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the economic situation in Africa and the living conditions of the vast majority of Africans are a cause of concern for my delegation. By virtually any standard, the African continent remains marginalized. The statistics for the continent are dismal. With slightly over 10 per cent of the world's population, sub-Saharan Africa accounts for a meagre 1.5 per cent of world trade. The region receives less than 0.6 per cent of total foreign direct investment. Coupled with this is the fact that Africa's export earnings have been on the decline due to a significant decrease in the demand for primary commodities; Africa's terms of trade have not improved; a crushing debt burden and a serious lack of capacity to generate domestic savings have worsened the economic situation. These negative trends have increased the dependence of most sub-Saharan African countries on official development assistance, but official development assistance itself has also been on the decline, falling from 0.33 per cent of the combined gross national product of donors members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1992 to 0.22 per cent in 1998. This is a far cry from the 0.7 per cent target agreed upon by the international community in the early 1970s.

The current state of economic globalization indicates that Africa remains the least integrated continent and the most marginalized economically. Africa has effectively been locked out of the benefits accruing from globalization. The challenge before the international community is to adopt and implement, as a matter of urgency, concrete measures to mitigate the negative consequences of globalization on African economies. The United Nations must take the lead in efforts to restructure the international monetary system to make it more responsive to the plight of African and other developing countries. Uganda believes that fundamental restructuring of the present international economic system is essential to transform the world from a mere constellation of

wealthy cities surrounded by a galaxy of abject poverty into a truly global village.

The pivotal role played by transnational corporations in this inequitable economic system demands that the United Nations play a more active role in our collective efforts to regulate the activities of these powerful non-state actors. My delegation would like to propose the revival of the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations and the United Nations Commission on Transnational Corporations for that purpose. The increasing control and dominance exercised by global corporations over the world economy has serious consequences for many of us. It is time Governments, and not multinational corporations, set the international agenda for economic cooperation and development.

I would like to underscore Uganda's commitment to uphold the tenets of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We believe in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other international human rights instruments. At the national level, Uganda has incorporated the universal principles of human rights into the basic law of the country, and we are committed to the principles of good governance, transparency and accountability.

The world is aware of the great debate taking place in Uganda about the process of our democratization. In accordance with our Constitution, the people of Uganda will exercise a free choice to determine their system of governance in a referendum next year. I take this opportunity to invite observers and others who may wish to witness the referendum to do so when the time comes.

With regard to internal conflicts, Uganda has granted a blanket amnesty to all who lay down their arms and become part of civil society. An amnesty Bill is before our Parliament, and in a very short time will be passed into law.

I would be remiss if I did not emphasize Uganda's commitment to the observance, in the region, of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In 1994 the world was witness to genocide in Rwanda in which an estimated 1 million people were massacred. A similar act was about to be perpetrated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the course of 1997 and 1998. Apart from our legitimate concerns about our national security and territorial integrity, Uganda finds it unacceptable that gross violations of the right to life should again be carried out in its neighbourhood or anywhere else in the world.

It is vital for all of us to recognize the sanctity of the right to life. We are glad to note that the evolution of international law on human rights no longer condones genocide under the guise of non-interference in a country's internal affairs. The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States has been so fundamentally eroded that the international community should now openly adopt a definitive convention which will permit instant intervention in cases of massive threats to the right to life.

In July 1998 the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries overwhelmingly adopted the Statute for the establishment of an International Criminal Court. Uganda has consistently identified itself with the entire process which culminated in the adoption of the Court's Statute. It was to many a triumphant moment for those hitherto yearning for a world in which individual persons, regardless of their socio-economic or political attributes, would be held personally accountable for acts or omissions resulting in genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. At present work is under way in the Preparatory Commission for the Court to define aggression as a core crime. Once the Statute comes into force, it holds humanity's best hope for a new world legal order under which nobody, however high or low, can engage in horrendous crimes with impunity.

We urge the international community to support our efforts in the Great Lakes region focused on stopping, averting and reversing progression towards further chaos and restoring peace. Such support must include real improvement of the socioeconomic wellbeing of our peoples through debt cancellations, promotion of democratic governance, adherence to sustainable human rights standards and, above all, strengthening our regional conflict- resolution mechanisms, peacemaking and peace-building initiatives.

Throughout this year world attention has been repeatedly drawn to the fact that citizens of the world are about to enter a new millennium. I would like to share with the Assembly Uganda's expectations for the new century and millennium with regard to the role of the United Nations.

We in Uganda recognize that the United Nations played a pivotal role in the decolonization of Africa and other parts of the world. The United Nations played an equally vital role in the eradication of institutionalized racial discrimination in southern Africa. For all these efforts we are grateful.

The question arises as to what should be the vision and goals of the United Nations through the next century. It is the view and expectation of the people of Uganda that the focus of the United Nations should be the elimination of poverty in Africa and the rest of the underdeveloped world. The factors underlying underdevelopment have been mentioned several times. However, implementation of solutions has fallen short of expectations.

We urge the United Nations to adopt concrete measures to deal with problems of the external debt burden, illiteracy, disease and famine. We expect the United Nations, through the World Trade Organization, to create a more favourable international trading regime which can promote fair competition and permit the ascendancy of primary commodity producers from abject poverty to reasonable wealth.

Uganda supports the heroic struggle of the Sahraoui people for self-determination, and we look forward to the holding of a referendum by the United Nations to enable the people of that territory to freely determine their destiny. My delegation would like to express deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and former United States Secretary of State, Mr. James Baker, for their tireless efforts in this regard. We appeal to the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco to respect the verdict of the Sahraoui people and to facilitate the implementation of whatever decision they make.

The situation in the Great Lakes region, and particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has been cause for serious concern, not only to the countries in the region, but also to the international community. On its part, Uganda continues to view issues of peace and stability in the region with the utmost seriousness, which they deserve.

Uganda's desire for peace and stability is born out of its conviction that without regional peace and security there can be no meaningful economic development and social well-being of its people. Uganda is hopeful that the conflicts that today beset many countries in the region will give way to peace and eventual socio-economic transformation. We are also hopeful that, with the region's resolve, we shall be able to surmount the challenges and exploit the opportunities of the new millennium. Indeed, sustained efforts are being made to put an end to the crisis and contribute to the search for peaceful solutions to the problems facing the region. And whereas efforts and contributions towards peace in the region have traversed a long and difficult road, there is optimism for the future.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the countries in the region, with the support of the international community, have been working tirelessly towards promoting a peaceful solution to the crisis. We acknowledge the regional efforts, under the leadership of President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia, which culminated in the signing of the ceasefire Agreement. I pay tribute to all the parties concerned for this achievement and to all well-wishers for their continued support for the peace process. The Agreement was thoroughly negotiated to the satisfaction of all the parties.

Uganda appeals to the international community to assist in efforts to operationalize the Joint Military Commission and the Political Committee, which are organs of the Lusaka Agreement and the key to the success of this Agreement and, therefore, to peace in the subregion.

Uganda is committed to the implementation of the Lusaka Agreement and believes that all the signatories to the Agreement are committed to its success. Against this background, it was unnecessary for this matter to be included on the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly. The Ceasefire Agreement essentially covers the two primary causes of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, namely, the external and internal dimensions. Regarding the external dimension, a mechanism was established to handle the security concerns of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbouring countries, including Uganda. In particular, the Security Council was requested, in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity, to constitute, facilitate and deploy an appropriate peacekeeping force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure implementation of the Agreement, including the tracking down, disarming and documenting of all renegade forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Regarding the internal dimension, the Congolese parties agreed to undertake political negotiations as a result of which the parties are expected to conclude an agreement leading to a new political dispensation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the restructuring and rebuilding of a new national army in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the establishment and strengthening of State administration over the entire territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is Uganda's hope that the inter-Congolese negotiations will provide an opportunity for the Congolese parties to address issues of good governance. Our desire for the

Congolese people to reach mutual understanding derives from the fact that political instability in any neighbouring country directly impinges on our own security and economic development. We will look forward, therefore, to the early beginning and success of the inter-Congolese negotiations.

Regarding the conflict in the Sudan, Uganda supports the ongoing peace initiative launched under the auspices of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and with the facilitation of President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya. As a neighbour and a member of IGAD, Uganda has been working closely with the other countries in the region in efforts aimed at a peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, peace in that country remains elusive.

Uganda is convinced that the fundamental issue in the Sudanese crisis is the link between state and religion. In a multireligious and multicultural society such as the Sudan, the only way to achieve good governance is to guarantee freedom of worship, equality and respect for all.

At the bilateral level, we are concerned at the increasing hostility towards Uganda from the Sudan, as manifested in the consistent violation of Uganda's territorial integrity and in active support for rebel groups that are destabilizing us. Uganda has embraced and will continue to embrace all initiatives aimed at reconciliation with the Sudan, despite the fact that all previous initiatives have failed. I would like to single out initiatives by former President Rafsanjani of Iran, President Bakili Muluzi of Malawi, President Qadhafi of Libya, former President Mandela of South Africa and others — all these efforts have come to naught.

The three East African countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are very conscious of the fact that political stability is a prerequisite for economic development and have taken the necessary measures to achieve this objective. The three countries, together with their partners in the region, are engaged in regional peace efforts for Burundi, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, through organizations such as IGAD and the Southern African Development Community. The three countries have invested in peace in order to ensure regional stability because of the recognition that peace and political stability are vital if the region is to attract investments.

Today, our region has created a favourable environment for foreign investment. There exists a very strong political will to move the region towards closer cooperation. We have harmonized many of our economic policies, and a number of joint activities in support of regional economic integration are being undertaken. The three countries are now in an advanced stage of cementing the relationship by signing a treaty that would establish the East African Community before the end of the year. We thank our development partners who have been supporting our efforts towards regional economic integration and look forward to continued cooperation, especially in the area of infrastructure development and in the field of capacity-building for the private sector, which have been identified as the key areas.

In conclusion, I would like to state that Uganda shares the vision of an African renaissance in which African peoples participate fully in their systems of governance and in the process of determining their destiny. We believe that this is a recipe for rapid economic development and therefore for the eradication of poverty in Africa.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

I call on the representative of the Sudan, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Khalil (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would not be taking your time at this late hour, Mr. President, nor that of the Assembly if the representative of the Ugandan regime had not made certain accusations regarding my country. I would like to reply to his fabrications. But first, I would like to recall a passage from a statement made by a Foreign Minister yesterday. He reminded us of the wise Buddhist understanding that people should ascertain facts before levelling accusations against others. We all know that all monotheistic religions and common moral values impose such standards on all of us.

We would like to reaffirm the respect and appreciation of the Sudanese people for the brotherly Ugandan people, with whom we share blood, historical ties and a common destiny. At the same time, we would like to remind the international community of the practices of the Ugandan regime and the character of its President. In this Assembly and in the Security Council

there have been many discussions and examples regarding the policies of the Ugandan regime and its interventions. A representative of a certain State described the Ugandan President less than a year ago as a new Hitler. This was because of the many interventions and conflicts and the instability that the Ugandan regime has fostered and practised in all its neighbouring countries.

These acts were committed to achieve personal aims that are not recognized by international laws nor by African traditions and norms. We are all aware of these attempts, particularly the most recent, to invade a neighbouring State. Suffice it to say that one item on our agenda is entitled "Armed aggression against the Democratic Republic of the Congo".

These practices and policies of the Ugandan President, committed before the eyes of the entire international community, *inter alia*, to pillage the wealth of certain countries in which his forces had intervened and to transfer such wealth to his personal accounts have been reported in the world's press along with sarcastic reference to the extensive national resources that he wasted in carrying out such adventures. The Sudan, like all Uganda's neighbours, has also suffered from the adventures and the intervention of the Ugandan President in its internal affairs. These actions have all been documented by the Security Council and I do not believe I need to recall them all at this point.

At a time when the Ugandan representative claims before the General Assembly that his country supports the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to establish peace in southern Sudan, Uganda is actually providing political and material support to the southern rebels, who are headquartered on Ugandan territory, whence they launch their operations. The Ugandan representative also claimed that it was the Sudan that rejected all attempts by Iran, Libya and Mali to mediate the conflict between the two countries.

All interested parties, especially those States that sincerely and repeatedly tried to reconcile our differences, are well aware of the reasons behind the failure of these attempts. The Ugandan President has continually made promises and signed joint statements and agreements on which he then reneged, reconfirming again and again the non-credibility of the Ugandan regime and that it has designs in the region to foment instability not only in the Sudan, but also in other neighbouring States.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/54/3, which contains a tentative programme of work and schedule of plenary meetings for the period from 29 September to the end of November and which has been distributed in the Hall.

This schedule was prepared to facilitate the organization of work of delegations and to help ensure that the relevant documentation is ready for the discussion of the respective items.

I should like to remind members that the list of speakers for the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons under agenda item 106, "Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family", is already open. The lists of speakers for other items listed in document A/INF/54/3 are open.

In addition I should like to announce the following activities.

The 1999 United Nations Pledging Conference for Development Activities will be held in the mornings of both Tuesday and Wednesday, 2 and 3 November.

The announcement of voluntary contributions to the 2000 programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will take place on Thursday, 18 November, in the morning.

The announcement of voluntary contributions to the 2000 programmes of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East will take place on Wednesday, 8 December, in the morning.

Members are requested to consult the *Journal* for the announcements on these activities for further details.

I will in due course announce the dates for the consideration of other agenda items as well as keep the Assembly informed of any additions or changes.

The meeting rose at 7.25 p.m.